

sojourners

April 2015 | sojo.net

Faith in Action for Social Justice

RESISTING ISIS

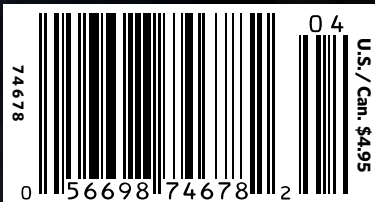
Soaad Nofal, a Muslim schoolteacher who staged a daily vigil outside ISIS headquarters in Raqqa, Syria, is part of a surprising movement of nonviolent resistance against ISIS brutality.

PLUS:

Is Comcast lying about net neutrality?

Forgive us our (education) debts

Mercy me: Why I shot a robin





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THE MERCILESS BRUTALITY of ISIS jihadists—from the beheading of 21 Egyptians to the burning alive of a Jordanian soldier—is a moral outrage and a deepening concern for the world's political powers. While debate rages about military answers, another under-the-radar response has emerged inside of ISIS-held territories: Nonviolent resistance.

Maria J. Stephan, a senior policy fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace, explores this underreported movement energized by peace activists in both Syria and Iraq, activists who have not given up hope for their countries. From individuals, such as Soaad Nofal and her courageous public stand

against ISIS in Raqqa, Syria, to long-standing organized groups committed to peace, a grassroots wave of resistance is countering violence with hope. And *Sojourners* contributing editor David Cortright writes about the limits of a military response to terrorism and the alternatives that, in the long run, can promote outcomes of lasting peace.

Stateside, Virginia Gilbert studies the increasing burden of education debts on college graduates, which has created a type of indentured servitude that for many proves difficult to escape. And the government has become the collection agency.

Our Beatitudes series continues with



a confessional account from author Josh MacIvor-Andersen, one that informs the calls for mercy in our own lives today. “Lord have mercy” is both a cry for healing in a broken world and a call for God’s intervening hand. ■

Letters

WELCOMING STRANGERS

Thank you, Jim Wallis (“We Were Strangers Once, Too,” February 2015), for another sensitive editorial. Your reference to Mark’s gospel on caring for the needy is what I have followed carefully. Regarding immigration, Leviticus 19:33-34 states our responsibility clearly: “If a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” And more recently, the sign on the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” Members of Congress know neither their Bibles nor American history.

Ron Osborn

Hamilton, Montana

“Members of Congress know neither their Bibles nor American history.”

from the universe.” I embody this beatitude when I allow myself to soften anything that holds me tight—opinions, harshness, rigidity, judgment toward others and myself—making space for the gifts and blessings of all creation to enter and enliven my being. While it is not easy, Jesus’ invitation to healing is, for me, clear and empowering.

Anne Bosch

Travelers Rest, South Carolina

EDUCATION INEQUALITY

Lisa Sharon Harper’s “An Education in Implicit Bias” (January 2015) covers a number of good points, but contains one significant factual error. Harper incorrectly writes that schools are funded through local “homeownership” taxes. In most of the country, schools are actually funded by property taxes. It is an easy mistake to make, since homeowners are the largest group that pays these taxes, but the levies are actually assessed on all real estate, save that owned by government agencies. Funding for schools comes not only from owner-occupied residential property, but also from rental residences and both

commercial and industrial properties.

Her overall point remains valid. Areas with high levels of home ownership do tend to have higher property values than those that are primarily rental homes. In addition, a great deal of rental housing (even in areas with high property values) is in the form of apartments, which provide more housing units per tax lot, thus requiring the same revenue to provide for more students. Because property values usually correlate strongly with the wealth of the residents, the areas in which good public education is most needed frequently have the public schools that lack the resources necessary to provide that education.

Nathan Hampton

Oak Grove, Oregon

THE POWER OF MEEKNESS

I am grateful for Margaret Atwood’s reflections on the “Blessed are the meek” beatitude in “What about the Meek?” (January 2015). I would like to add an interpretation of these words from *The Prayers of the Cosmos* that has been transformative for me: “Healthy are those who have softened what is rigid within; they shall receive physical vigor and strength

CORRECTION

In our January 2015 issue, we misidentified English poet William Blake as Catholic. He was nominally Anglican.

Your turn. Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, *Sojourners*, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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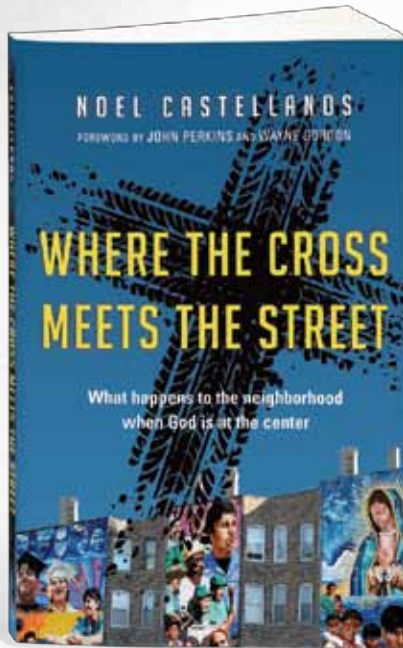
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NEW BOOK FROM NOEL CASTELLANOS



"[Through our] relationship with Noel, we have grown tremendously in our understanding of others living in the margins of our society. Noel helped us to move from a black/white association toward a more full expression of the American experience of Asian, Native American, Latinos and being more inclusive towards the great diversity we have in America."

From the Foreword by
John Perkins and Wayne Gordon

BY JIM WALLIS

Torturous Logic



THE SENATE Intelligence Committee finally released in December its long-delayed report on “enhanced interrogation techniques” employed by the CIA in the U.S. global “war on terrorism.” That these techniques—including waterboarding, “rectal feeding,” weeklong sleep deprivation, threats to harm detainees’ children—constituted torture, in clear violation of the Geneva Conventions, is a reality that is difficult to deny. Sen. Dianne Feinstein and her colleagues should be commended for facing and exposing the grim truths behind our nation’s post-9/11 conduct.

Unfortunately, recent polling has revealed some disturbing attitudes among Americans on this issue—particularly among Christians. A

an effective means of acquiring intelligence”; “complicated, and in some cases impeded, the national security missions”; and “damaged the United States’ standing in the world.”

Lamentably, this disconnect between the opinions of average Americans about this issue and the realities documented in the Senate report goes a long way toward explaining how these human rights abuses were carried out in the first place. The ideals that make us who we are as a nation were subverted and perverted in the name of our safety, and people let it happen because they were angry and afraid. And when, among Christians, anger and fear replace Christian thinking and acting, this is a theological issue and not just a political one.

There are many culpable forces and people behind this tragedy. For example, we have a pop culture that has consistently portrayed torture as a necessary tool to save innocent lives from imminent threats (the TV show *24* is a prime example of this). More recently, the film *Zero Dark Thirty* suggested that torture helped us find Osama bin Laden—a claim that is explicitly refuted by the Senate report. But since the film came out before the report was declassified, it’s possible that the fictional narrative of the movie has claimed a stronger hold over many people’s opinions on this issue than the truth of the report. Fiction replacing facts, fear replacing deeper wisdom on what really makes us secure, and anger replacing Paul’s clear instructions not to return evil for evil but to overcome evil with good—these are all core issues that must be addressed.

Of course, those most guilty are the government officials who devised and sanctioned these programs. The public face of this camp is surely former Vice President Dick Cheney, who to this day is completely unrepentant about this program and his

role in it. Cheney’s aggressive arrogance and utter lack of self-reflection represent a real threat to national security and to the prospects of ever resolving our current global conflicts. Though it is certainly nothing new, it continues to be intellectually baffling and morally indicting to see Cheney’s persistent denial of any wrongdoing, even in the face of everything we now know. But it is at least clarifying to have one man so completely represent what has been most wrong with U.S. foreign policy. In contrast, Sen. John McCain, a traditional war hawk, has shown consistent courage in opposing torture in principle and practice.

We must now truly repent of this painful chapter of our history—commit to a true change of heart and mind that will take us in a new direction. The hopeful news is that despite large numbers of Christians who say they support the CIA’s techniques, other Christians are leading the way in opposition to torture, and they have been doing so for more than a decade. Leaders such as Ron Stief of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture and prominent evangelical thinkers such as David Gushee have provided powerful moral and theological witness against U.S. torture, and they continue to do so in wake of the Senate report’s release. The prophetic leadership of Christians such as these has been a powerful voice for principled change in U.S. policy.

As servants of a Lord who was tortured to death, we must commit as the Body of Christ to healing the wounds we have inflicted on our fellow human beings—even and especially those we call our enemies. Only by doing so can our own wounds from this sad era begin to heal. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

As servants of a Lord who was tortured to death, we must commit to healing the wounds we have inflicted.

Washington Post/ABC News poll conducted shortly after the Senate report’s release found that 59 percent of Americans believe the CIA’s treatment of suspected terrorists was justified, compared to just 31 percent who believe it was unjustified. Startlingly, among Christians who were polled, that number rises to between 66 percent and 75 percent who believe the techniques were justified. In this same poll, 53 percent of respondents indicated they believe these techniques produced important information that could not have been obtained any other way, compared to just 31 percent who disagree.

These poll results fly in the face of the Senate report’s findings. Some of the key phrases from the report summarize the CIA’s “enhanced interrogation” program as follows: “Not

Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images



Honoring Gandhi

President Barack Obama scattered flower petals at the memorial to Mohandas Gandhi in New Delhi during Obama's January visit to India. He also planted a sacred Peepal tree sapling in the nearby garden. In India, Peepal planting is part of a popular reforestation movement to combat climate change. Obama and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, however, failed to hammer out a comprehensive climate change agreement.

By Jerry L. Van Marter

Cuba, North Korea, and Freedom

Two countries lumped together in the "axis of evil" have few similarities.

THOUGH SOME HAVE accepted "axis of evil" characterizations of Cuba and North Korea, my experiences of the two countries—nine visits to Cuba and one week in North Korea—have led me to far different conclusions: There are very few similarities between the two nations, and neither is inherently "evil."

Music infuses the air in Cuba as in no other of the 60 countries to which I've traveled. The streets are alive. Children play baseball and soccer in the streets. Cafes, parks, and other public places are crowded and noisy. Nearly everyone I've met has treated me like a long-lost friend, even more so when they learn I'm American. There is a natural affinity between Cubans and Americans. More than 100 flights a week ferry people between Havana and Miami.

In North Korea, the streets are eerily quiet. There is virtually no visible human interaction. North Koreans are forbidden to make eye contact with Westerners. There appear to be no public gathering

places except the massive government plazas where military parades and government rallies are staged. I was never allowed to go anywhere without a "minder." I traveled with a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) official who was born in North Korea and returns there frequently. His counsel: "Assume that everywhere you go you are followed and that every conversation you have, no matter where, is bugged." His relatives received permission to travel from their home village to Pyongyang to visit him. In our hotel room, he turned the television volume up to full blast before they began talking quietly. On one early morning walk near our hotel (the only time I was unescorted), I took a few photographs. By the time I returned to the hotel, government representatives were waiting in the lobby, demanding to see all my photos and instructing me on which ones to delete.

Over the course of nine visits to Cuba, I have had open conversations with everyone from high-ranking government officials to cab drivers and farmers. I have never sensed

any hesitation on anyone's part to express their political views. I have heard as many criticisms of the Cuban government and policies as of the U.S. embargo. I have also heard the aspirations of countless Cubans. Though organized public dissent is severely restricted, one thing is certain: I have not spoken to a single Cuban who wants to return to the pre-revolution system of unbridled capitalism, corruption, and U.S. domination.

In North Korea, I experienced no exchange of ideas about anything. All conversations were monotonously rote: "The U.S. is openly and totally hostile to North Korea and South Korea is an illegitimate U.S. proxy." Some of this, of course, can be explained by the fact that North Korea is still technically at war with the two countries—the Korean War ended in 1953 with an armistice, but not a peace treaty. That reality completely colors the official North Korean posture, a posture that is universally expressed, if not shared, throughout North Korea. North Korea is utterly isolated, by its own choice.

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The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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The church in Cuba has grown rapidly since religious leaders reached a rapprochement with the government in the early 1990s. Presbyterians, Anglicans, Baptists, and Pentecostals make up about 10 percent of the island's population, which is overwhelmingly Catholic. There are also Orthodox and Jewish communities in Cuba. Religious education, youth ministry, and diaconal work are exploding. Ecumenical life is rich. Several Christian leaders serve in the Cuban parliament. The minister of religions, Caridad Diego Bello, is a trusted advocate for the church in Cuba.

The sole expression of organized religion in North Korea is the Korean Christian Federation (KCF), a government-controlled body that exerts complete authority over all religious activity in the country. Two congregations are allowed to meet for Sunday

worship, both in Pyongyang, but children are not allowed to participate and instead attend government-run "educational classes." House churches are allowed under the auspices of the KCF—I attended one and worship seemed far more authentic than in the two formal houses of worship.

Americans tend to equate "freedom" with "democracy." But in my travels for the Presbyterian News Service, I have witnessed far more nuanced distinctions. Cuba, like many other countries, has considerable freedom without U.S.-style democracy. North Korea has neither. ■

Jerry L. Van Marter retired in December 2014 after 27 years reporting for the Presbyterian News Service, the official news agency of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

By Robin Kirk

The Torture Monkey

What it looks like when we go to Dick Cheney's "dark side."

THERE'S NO BETTER sequel to the Senate Select Intelligence Committee's executive summary of the torture report than Mohamedou Ould Slahi's newly published *Guantánamo Diary*. This harrowing tale is only one of what someday will be many direct accounts by victims.

Originally from Mauritania, Slahi, 44, was detained on a journey home in January 2000 and questioned about the so-called Millennium plot to bomb the Los Angeles airport. Slahi admitted that he'd fought against Afghanistan's communist government with the Mujahideen, at that time supported by the U.S. But he never opposed the United States. Authorities released him. A year and a half later, the young engineer was again detained and again released.

Months later, Slahi drove himself to a local police station to answer questions. This time, Americans forced him onto a CIA plane bound for Jordan, where he claims he was tortured. On Aug. 5, 2002, Americans brought him to Guantánamo. Slahi is among the detainees whose horrific torture there is the centerpiece of the Senate report. None other than then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld signed the "special interrogation plan" authorizing his brutal ordeal.

Slahi divides his imprisonment into pre-torture, when he truthfully denied any involvement in terrorism, and post-torture, "where my brake broke loose. I yessed every accusation my interrogators made. I even wrote the infamous confession about me planning to hit the CN Tower in Toronto, based on SSG [redacted] advice. I just wanted to get the monkeys off my back."

His captors beat and threatened him, and subjected him to bitter cold, sleep deprivation, stress positions, and repulsive sexual abuse by female interrogators. Yet Slahi seems more traumatized by the torture he witnessed: teenagers who could barely lift their heads, confused old men, and others like him who said anything to get the pain to stop.

Slahi taught himself English so he could write his 466-page memoir. Once his lawyers got his manuscript released, authorities refused to let Slahi's editor, journalist Larry Siems, meet with him.

Siems calls the memoir "a journey through the darkest regions of the United States' post-9/11 detention and interrogation program." Far from regretting the darkness, torture's most adamant defender, former Vice President Dick Cheney, vehemently urged the U.S. to go to the "dark side"

From the Archives

April 1976

Theology for Real Life

THE DIALOGUES

I am having with others in my late 30s are in contrast with the ones I had in my 20s when I was a single suburbanite. ... My aroused feminist perspective tempts me to say that traditional evangelical theology was adequate when I was living with a primarily masculine (in the Jungian sense) orientation to life, but has revealed deficiencies as I have related to life out of a more feminine consciousness.

Being pregnant, lactating, and caring for infants and toddlers; knowing isolation in an urban apartment; seeing the effects of racism, affluence, sexism, and waste—these are very concrete experiences and ones that have been often so exhausting that the necessary energy for abstract, focused thinking has often not been available. Life has become more responsive to the pragmatic, and the help that really helps must relate more to my being and my doing than to my thinking.

This is, of course, a false dichotomy, but how it cannot be a dichotomy is troublesome to me. I have been taught that correct doctrine, orthodoxy, is the source and prerequisite to correct living. ... In my saner moments, I hold to the analysis that evangelical doctrine is correct as far as it goes, but it often does not extend far enough into the life situation of women and men and children who are oppressed and bound by realities that rarely oppress evangelical theologians. ■

Judy Brown Hull was co-chair of *Evangelicals for Social Action* when this article appeared.



after 9/11. Responding to the Senate report, in December 2014, Cheney was even more emphatic, saying he'd "do it again in a minute." He even accepted that innocents might have been tortured, dismissing this as inevitable collateral damage.

So what happens now? The aftermath of the report's release has been disheartening at best. In January, incoming Senate Intelligence Committee chair Richard Burr asked the White House to return copies of the full report (only a redacted summary has been released publicly). Sen. Feinstein blasted back, saying this "would limit the ability to learn lessons from this sad chapter in America's history." The Obama administration plans no investigations, let alone prosecutions, of torturers. Although one of the president's first acts after his 2009 inauguration was to sign an executive order banning torture, his administration has repeatedly gone to court arguing the state secrets privilege to prevent victims from pursuing civil claims.

By Emilie Teresa Smith

Coming in From the Cold

Pope Francis is restoring relations with Latin American liberation theologians.

JON SOBRINO LAUGHS ever so slightly at my question. His office in the Monseñor Romero Center in San Salvador is a paper cavern, a place where a theological archeologist digging to understand the highs and the lows of liberation movements within the church would find a mother lode of artifacts.

Where is liberation theology going from here under Pope Francis? Sobrino, perhaps one of the most prolific liberation theologians, is thin and thoughtful. He considers his words: Liberation theology is a way of thinking about how a Christian must live—in active, engaged struggle for the flourishing of all life. Liberation is the primary movement of the Holy Spirit. It is the duty of those baptized into the life, death, and ministry of Jesus Christ to live this out, immediately and urgently.

In March 2013, when Argentine Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Sobrino's fellow Jesuit, became pope, liberation theologians and practitioners took a deep collective breath—what would happen next?

The popes of the 1980s and '90s had

And what of Slahi? He remains one of 122 men still imprisoned at Guantánamo, even though a judge ordered his release and military prosecutors themselves say he's innocent.

Rights advocates rightly lambaste the White House and Congress for not doing more to investigate and punish torturers. But there will be more and possibly worse stories than Slahi's. U.N. rights monitors have called for prosecutions. Already, European lawyers and rights groups are exploring charges against U.S. officials such as Cheney, Rumsfeld, and others, who will have to beware any Continental vacations.

Even if evidence of torture continues to be buried, one thing is clear: The torture monkey on our back won't go away anytime soon. ■

Robin Kirk, an award-winning author and human rights activist, teaches at Duke University and co-directs the Duke Human Rights Center at the Franklin Humanities Institute.

removed all support for the promoters of liberation theology who had lived out the "preferential option for the poor," born from Vatican II and the 1968 Medellín conference of Latin American bishops. The church's identification with the poor was a direct strike against the closed oligarchic structures that had strangled the lands and peoples since the European conquest.

The oligarchy, which controlled governments and armies, struck back. The Latin American oligarchic wars created countless liberation Christian martyrs.

Efforts toward recognizing the Christian martyrs and saints of the wars were blocked by church officials. Soon conservative church hierarchs were again ascendant. The six instructors of the University of Central America—Sobrino's brother Jesuits—their housekeeper, and her daughter who were brutally murdered by members the U.S.-backed Salvadoran military were not recognized in any category as protectors of the faith. The murdered bishops of Latin America—including Enrique Angelelli of Argentina (1976),

Juan José Gerardi of Guatemala (1998), and Óscar Romero of El Salvador (1980)—were left off of the list of nearly 500 saints proclaimed by Pope John Paul II.

Additionally, liberation theologians were disowned and prevented from writing. The Vatican's doctrinal office, then headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (who became Pope Benedict XVI), condemned liberation theology for its supposed "serious ideological deviations." Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff was silenced in 1985. Peruvian Gustavo Gutiérrez, called the "father of liberation theology," was censured. Even Sobrino was notified by the Vatican that disciplinary measures were under way against his theological and doctrinal teaching.

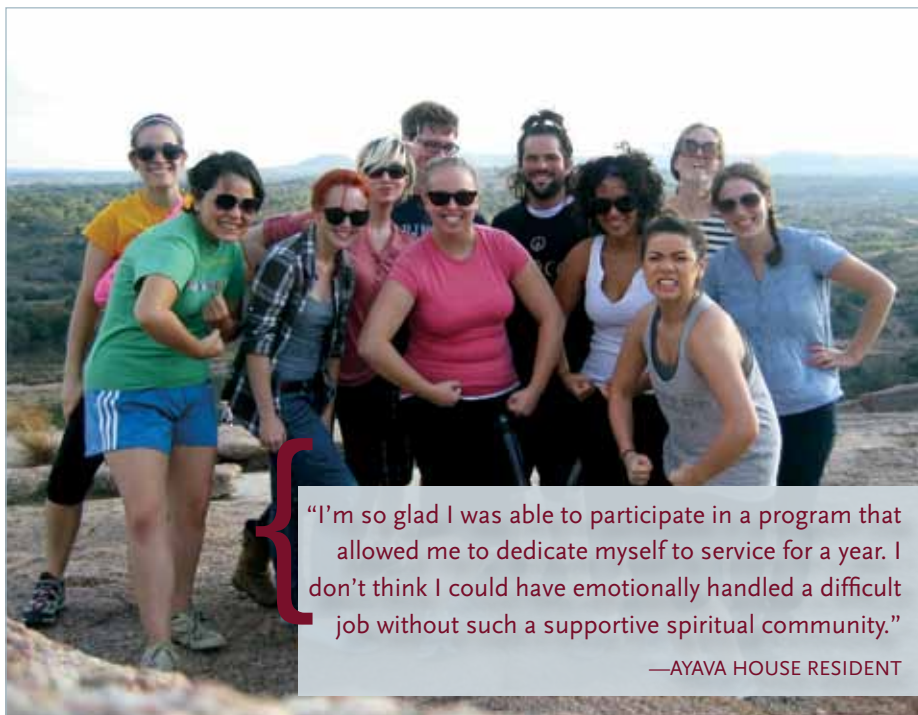
But with the arrival of Pope Francis, a fresh wind is blowing. Almost immediately, Francis set about restoring relations with Latin American liberation theologians. Boff and Gutiérrez have both met with the pontiff, while Sobrino speaks of "Papa Francisco" with his usual caution—hopeful, slightly ironic, infinitely patient.

The greatest sign that Pope Francis is doing something different came on Feb. 3, when the Vatican office that promotes individuals for sainthood declared that El Salvador's assassinated Archbishop Romero was officially a martyr of the church, that his murder had been an act of hatred for the faith.

This is more than a fine canonical point. It is a remarkable statement, vindicating the courageous death of many other martyrs. Those who killed them would have firmly called themselves Christians. The Vatican has (at last) proclaimed that they were in fact not Christians at all, but were enemies of the faith.

For Sobrino, liberation theology, no matter what it is called, is the inevitable moving of the Holy Spirit, God's unstoppable renovation of the whole of creation. "San Romero de las Américas" is already a saint in the hearts of the people. He has been for 35 years. The people in El Salvador, in Latin America, and around the world have declared this to be God's truth, no matter what is said thousands of miles away in Rome. ■

Emilie Teresa Smith, an Argentine-Canadian Anglican priest, is co-president of the Oscar Romero International Network in Solidarity with the Peoples of Latin America.



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Is the Language of Business Enough?

I'M PRIVILEGED to be part of a program called the Prime Movers Fellowship, a circle of mainly younger-generation social change agents launched by Ambassador Swanee Hunt and her late husband, Charles Ansbacher. In December, the Prime Movers had a retreat with the Council of Elders, an inspiring group of civil rights era activists. Those two days contained some of the most profound conversations I've been part of in 10 years.

Rev. Joyce Johnson facilitated masterfully, opening sessions with prayer and sacred song. Rev. John Fife spoke about launching the Sanctuary movement through churches. Rabbi Art Waskow connected the theme of the Eric Garner killing ("I can't breathe") with the climate challenge ("We can't breathe").

Rev. Nelson Johnson of the Beloved Community Center told a story about driving into the North



Prime Movers fellows

Prime Movers Fellowship

If we are closed to faith language, we may find ourselves burned up and frozen out.

Carolina mountains to try to convince a white supremacist to cancel a Ku Klux Klan rally in Greensboro. "I was driving alone," he explained, "and halfway up the mountain I started to get a little scared. So I stopped my car and got down on my knees to pray. I felt God tell me I was doing something necessary, and I felt my courage return." He got back into his car and drove on to the meeting.

AFTER THAT STORY, Rea Carey, a Prime Movers fellow, made an observation: When a civil rights era activist speaks, it is almost always infused with a deep religious commitment. When a younger-generation civic leader speaks, words such as "strategic plan," "long-term

objective," and "metric" are far more common.

It was a striking enough insight that about 20 of us gathered in a breakout session to discuss it.

The conversation took me back two decades to my early days as an activist, when I was a student at the University of Illinois. The language that first brought me into social change was critical theory, which was big in the early 1990s when I was coming up. But after about two years, that ethos left me simultaneously too hot and too cold—burned up with anger and frozen with analysis. It was Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement, with its explicit faith language and deep belief in cosmic love, that set me on the path that I walk today.

There is much to be gained from the business language of social change. Setting goals, designing plans, and executing well are good things, for sure. But there is something lost when that ethos dominates. I loved the retreat with the Council of Elders precisely because the connection to the cosmic that they carried lifted us

all. I went back to my work (writing a strategic plan with objectives and metrics, ironically enough) refreshed and joyous, feeling as if I could keep pushing my boulder up the mountain for many more years.

In the breakout session, a younger-generation activist made a stark confession: She was a deeply committed Christian, but rarely shared this in the younger-generation social entrepreneur circles in which she ran. Such circles were open to all forms of identity expression, except for faith.

This is a sadness and a problem. My generation of civic leaders is no doubt building impressive organizations, helped in large part by business thinking. But if we are building spaces that are closed to the faith language that sustained the courage and conviction of prior generations, we may well find ourselves both burned up and frozen out. ■



Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American of Indian heritage.



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RESISTING ISIS



Surprisingly, acts of civil resistance in Syria and Iraq have shown success against the so-called Islamic State • by MARIA J. STEPHAN

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IN JULY 2013 in Raqqa, the first city liberated from regime control in northeastern Syria, a Muslim schoolteacher named Soaad Nofal marched daily to ISIS headquarters. She carried a cardboard sign with messages challenging the behaviors of members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria as un-Islamic after the kidnapping of nonviolent activists. After Nofal was joined by hundreds of other protesters, a small number of activists were released. It is a small achievement, but an indication of what communities supported in responsible ways from the outside could achieve on a larger scale in areas controlled or threatened by ISIS.

In the fight against ISIS, unarmed civilians would seem to be powerless. How can collective nonviolent action stand a chance against a heavily armed, well-financed, and highly organized extremist group that engages in public beheadings, kidnappings, and forced recruitment of child soldiers and sex slaves? One whose ideology sanctions the killing of “infidels” and the creation of a caliphate?

Nonviolent resistance alone cannot defeat this radical scourge. The global response must be multifaceted. Still, as the international anti-ISIS coalition led by the United States considers nonmilitary options to “degrade and ultimately destroy” ISIS, it should focus on empowering local civil society in Syria and Iraq with targeted resources, technologies, and knowledge to build resilience and deny ISIS the moral and material support it needs to wield effective control. Public and private investments in independent media and local self-organization initiatives, including those led by women, are two key ways to counter ISIS influence.

Upper left: The Arabic word for “peace.”
Background: Men protest the brutality of jihadists by holding up Qurans outside the office of ISIS in Aleppo, Syria.



Soaad Nofal holds a sign challenging ISIS brutality outside its headquarters in Raqqa, Syria.



ISIS' Levers of Control

This type of external support first requires a sophisticated understanding of the levers and networks of influence that ISIS employs to capture and control territory and minds. While their brutality captures headlines, ISIS operators use their *Dabiq* propaganda magazine and a plethora of social media outlets to promote ISIS as resisting oppression and providing for local communities. ISIS is paying its fighters relatively high salaries. It is cutting deals with local tribal and other influential leaders to afford communities a degree of governance autonomy in exchange for obedience. And it is using targeted terror to deter any opposition.

As ruthless as ISIS' circa 30,000 fighters might be, the organization still relies on the active and passive obedience of large numbers of people. The challenge is to use collective action to weaken these dependency relationships while protecting civilians from greater violence—using tactics that go beyond street protests and demonstrations. Civil resistance historically has proven to be twice as effective as armed struggle, even against opponents willing to use mass violence and against nonstate actors.

Though typically out of the headlines, there is much nonviolent activism in Syria and Iraq that could be bolstered through international efforts. From the beginning of ISIS' presence in northern Syria, civilians challenged their rule—albeit on a small scale. After Nofal's early efforts, in April 2014 the "Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently" campaign created a Facebook page and Twitter account to expose ISIS' crimes against civilians, attracting thousands of followers. However, activists from Raqqa admitted that failure to take a more concerted earlier stand against ISIS helped the group consolidate a formidable presence there.

The villages of Kafr Nabl and Saraqeb in northern Idlib province remain hotbeds of creative Syrian nonviolent resistance. Kafr Nabl achieved international acclaim for its colorful and clever banners offering critical commentary on various aspects of the revolution. The village is a paradigm of self-organization and boasts a robust media apparatus. In Menbej, a town in Aleppo, the business community closed their shops in

a general strike against ISIS in May 2014. ISIS sent its militants to reopen the shops and the villagers remained defiant, albeit only for a short time.

Throughout Syria, the Local Coordination Committees (LCCs), once the backbone of the nonviolent resistance, are still leading grassroots activism despite more focus on humanitarian relief. The LCCs regularly document and publish information about crimes committed by the Assad regime and by ISIS. They are supported by new Syrian media outlets, which are innovating in extremely difficult circumstances.

Acts of defiance against ISIS are spreading.

The Aleppo Media Center, Enab Baladi, SouriaLi Radio, the Abounaddara Collective, Syria Untold, and other media continue to report on nonviolent grassroots initiatives to challenge violence on all sides and start the process of national healing.

An interactive map developed by the Syrian Nonviolence Movement shows where civil resistance is still happening inside Syria via noncooperation, civil disobedience, and the building of parallel structures and institutions. A major challenge for Syria activists facing regime barrel bombs, daily shelling, and extremist violence is finding ways to link these various initiatives.

This is where international support could come in. External actors could support these groups with grants and help to connect Syria activists to each other and to nonviolent leaders from other protracted conflicts (such as the Balkans, Liberia, and Colombia) to share lessons and best practices. The most dynamic and creative media projects advocating nonviolent approaches to transforming the conflict should be given the financial and technical means to vastly expand their reach inside Syria and regionally via FM and

Left, the logo for Local Coordination Committees, a leader in nonviolent resistance in Syria. Above, children at the Project Amal ou Salam youth camp in Jordan, a program for young people often targeted by ISIS recruiters.

satellite broadcasting. Women's participation in local councils should be strongly encouraged and supported.

In refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey—real and potential recruitment grounds for ISIS fighters—Syrian civic leaders have launched innovative educational and artistic programs targeting youth. These include the Sonbola education project in Lebanon and the Project Amal ou Salam youth camp initiative in Jordan; both initiatives are operating on a shoestring.

Growing Civil Disobedience in Iraq

Acts of defiance targeting ISIS are spreading in Iraq as well. In Mosul, a city overrun by the extremist group last summer, acts of civil disobedience are expanding among the mostly Sunni population that once sympathized with ISIS' fight against the Shia-dominated Iraqi army. A deteriorating economic situation and ISIS' failure to provide basic services are turning the population against it. In July 2014, after a prominent imam and 33 followers refused to pledge their allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, a large number of Iraqi supporters flocked to mosques where they preached to show solidarity for these leaders' act of defiance. ISIS detained some of the leaders but has not killed those with such a significant following.

Local groups of Iraqis have resisted ISIS' destruction of local landmarks and shrines in Mosul, a city that is considered an archeological treasure and paradigm of religious coexistence. In July 2014, when members of an ISIS battalion tasked with destroying mosques that were deemed heretical threatened to explode the Crooked Minaret,

Facebook photos



residents living nearby formed a human chain to protect it. They warned the fighters that they would need to kill them if they wanted to blow up the mosque. The militants backed down and left.

Satire has become a particularly powerful weapon of nonviolent resistance that Syrians, Iraqis, and others in the Arab world are using to delegitimize ISIS. Videos dramatizing the absurdity and illegitimacy of ISIS' tyranny have gone viral on social media and have been shown on satellite television stations.

The Long Game

Supporting civil resistance against ISIS is not a short-term strategy, and the organization's capacity for cruelty should not be underestimated. As the U.S. Special Operations Forces commander for the Middle East, Maj. Gen. Michael Nagata, has emphasized, the struggle against ISIS' ideological allure and power base must be long term. The link between extremism and predatory, discriminatory governance must be understood.

An alternative, more powerful, and life-affirming method for advancing rights, justice, and dignity should be proactively and creatively reinforced. The significant amount of U.S. and global resources being dedicated to waging the military campaign against ISIS should be matched by commensurate focus on the far less costly but arguably more important social and political battles being waged by civil societies in Syria and Iraq.

Helping these groups remain resilient, organized, and connected, assisting them to spread their counterextremist messages, and expanding their skills base in the area of strategic nonviolent action would go a long way to confronting the ISIS menace, along with the governance failures that spawned them. ■

Maria J. Stephan is senior policy fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace.

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THE POWER OF PEACEBUILDING

A military-only strategy won't defeat ISIS, and may even make things worse • by DAVID CORTRIGHT

THE PEACE MOVEMENT needs a stronger response to the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. It is not enough merely to oppose deepening U.S. military involvement. We must also identify viable diplomatic and political options for countering the ISIS danger and reducing violence in the region.

President Obama has said there is no military solution to the crisis in Iraq, but his administration has relied heavily on bombing as its main response to ISIS. Since August, the United States and about a dozen other states have launched more than 1,900 air strikes against ISIS and militant groups in Iraq and Syria. Approximately 80 percent of the strikes have been conducted by U.S. forces, mostly jet fighters but also armed drones. The strikes have had the effect of halting further ISIS encroachments into Iraq and have enabled Kurdish fighters to regain some ground in the northern part of Iraq. In Syria, however, ISIS reportedly has continued to gain ground despite the U.S.-led attacks.

U.S. military involvement in Iraq and Syria is having unintended effects that could make matters worse. Battling the United States gives ISIS a transcendent objective beyond its political agenda in Iraq and Syria and distracts local attention from its brutal policies. It allows ISIS to portray itself as the victim and to claim that it is defending Islam from Western attack. After the start of airstrikes in August, support for the group increased. The strikes in Syria have also targeted the al Nusra Front and have generated pressure for rival groups to close ranks. Unlike al Qaeda, ISIS has not declared war on the United States, but it may now rethink its strategic focus and plan attacks on the “far enemy,” to use al Qaeda’s term.

Overcoming the threat posed by ISIS cannot be achieved by military means. What’s needed is a comprehensive strategy that addresses the underlying conditions that have led to the rise of ISIS and related extremist groups. ISIS is an outgrowth of the Syrian civil war and of U.S. intervention and the subsequent civil conflict within Iraq. ISIS has grown by attracting the support of Sunni Arab communities fighting the Assad regime in Damascus and resisting repression by the Shia-dominated government in Baghdad. Overcoming ISIS will require policies that end these originating conflicts. In Syria this means a renewed diplomatic push to end the civil war and achieve a negotiated political settlement. In Iraq it means forging more-inclusive governance in Baghdad and addressing the grievances of Sunni Arab communities.

Achieving diplomatic and political solutions will require cooperation with other states, especially Russia and Iran. Despite their sharp differences, the United States and Russia share a common interest in suppressing ISIS and ending the war in Syria. Moscow has substantial influence with Damascus, as evidenced by its success in convincing the Syrian government to abandon its chemical weapons, and it can help bring the regime to the bargaining table. Russia has criticized the U.S. demand for the Assad regime to step down as a precondition for negotiations as unrealistic militarily and an obstacle to diplomacy. More than three years of brutal fighting seem to confirm Moscow’s assessment. The war has become a grinding stalemate between the Assad regime and its supporters on the one side and the extremist forces of ISIS and the al Nusra Front on the other. The moderate groups backed by the U.S. are weak and divided and have little

Bulent Kilic/AFP/Getty Images

U.S. military attacks allow ISIS to portray itself as the victim.



Turkish and Syrian protesters rally for peace in front of the Syrian consulate in Istanbul in 2011.

influence. The goal of eventually removing the murderous Assad regime remains valid, but to require this at the outset of talks is a nonstarter.

Achieving a diplomatic solution will also require engaging with Iran, which has significant leverage with both Syria and Iraq. Despite their many differences, Washington and Tehran agree on the need to end the war in Syria and counter the threat from ISIS. Rather than excluding Iran from U.N. negotiations as it has done in the past, Washington should welcome Tehran to the table. Iran is the only neighboring state with enough influence in Damascus and Baghdad to apply effective

pressure for political compromise.

Establishing cooperation with Iran will be difficult for the Obama administration, given the hostility to Iran of many members of Congress. Any movement toward engagement will probably depend on a successful outcome of negotiations on Tehran's nuclear program. Regardless of the outcome of those talks, the security benefits of working with Tehran to end the war in Syria could be huge.

The challenges and uncertainties in attempting to implement the proposed diplomatic and political strategies are enormous. If the United States were to devote as much effort to these approaches as it does

to military measures, the chances of success would increase. The current U.S. policy of bombing ISIS and sending more weapons and military advisers to the region will only prolong the fighting. Groups like ISIS thrive on war. To diminish their power requires reducing the level of armed violence and addressing the political grievances they exploit. Peacebuilding strategies offer the greatest promise for effectively countering ISIS. ■

David Cortright, a Sojourners contributing editor, is director of policy studies at Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies.

The high cost of U.S. education loans is causing a new form of indentured servitude • by VIRGINIA GILBERT

SARA WAS DESPERATE. She was fleeing an abusive husband, living with her mother in a mold-infested house, and she needed to rent an apartment. A recent college graduate, Sara had a job at a hospital that paid well and provided benefits. Apartment rent was within her means. But the background check came back to the landlord: “Do not rent.”

Sara (not her real name) was \$22,000 in arrears on her student loans. The more she tried to pay the debt, the higher the interest rate climbed. Only after she filed for bankruptcy did she learn that none of her student loans were eligible for even the basic bankruptcy protection afforded other debts. At any time, the lender could garnish her wages—even to the point of making it difficult to pay basic living expenses, such as rent and utilities.

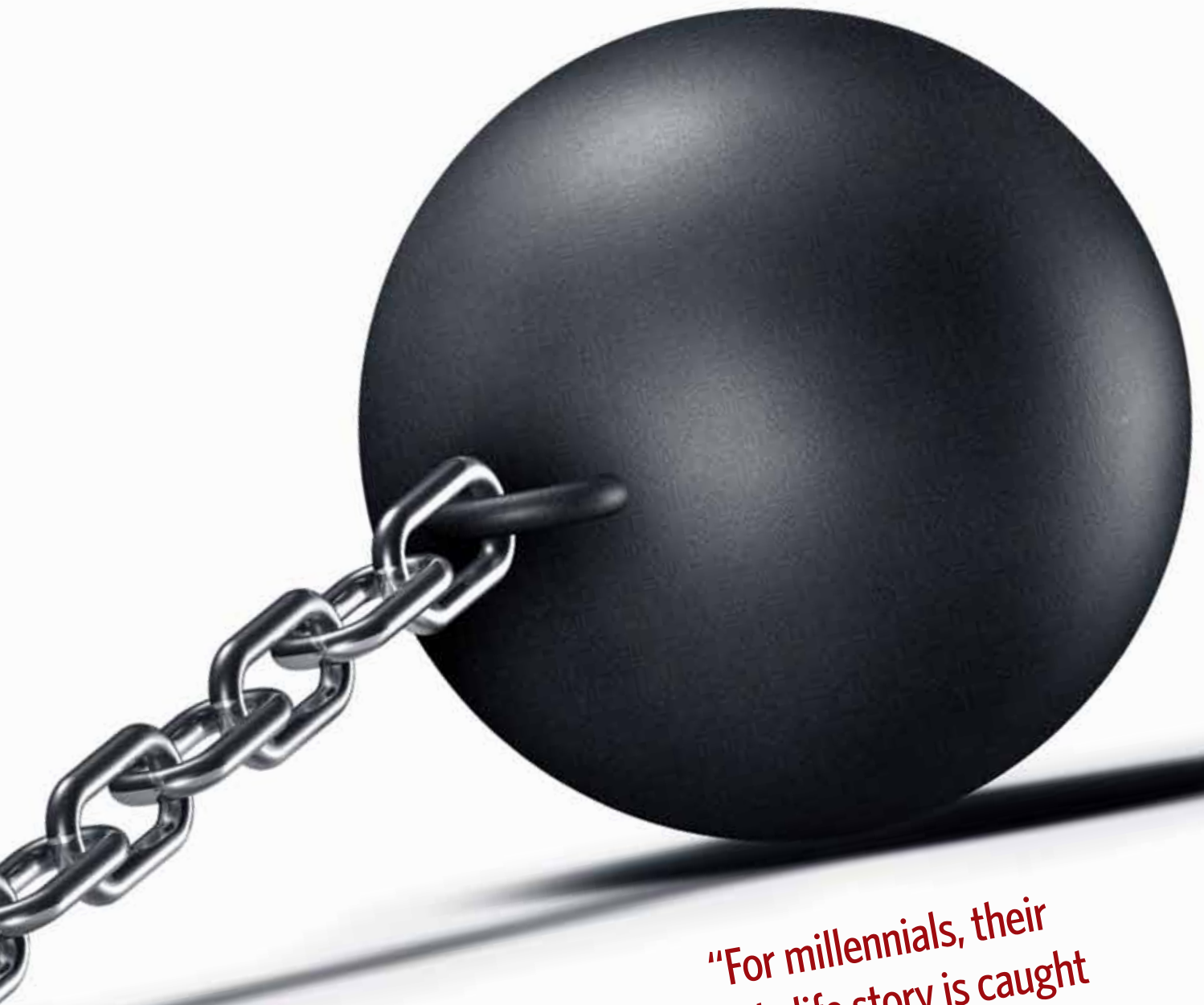
Sara is one of the new 21st century debtors, in financial bondage because they borrowed money for education. In 2014, the education debt in the United States totaled \$1.2 trillion. More than 7 million borrowers are in default.

Why are education loans so difficult to manage? Credit card debtors often can transfer high-interest debt to another lender for a better deal. Car loan borrowers

Getty Images

Forgive Us Our DEBTS





*"For millennials, their
whole life story is caught
up in this debt."*

can walk away from the loan and allow the car to be repossessed. Homeowners can refinance their mortgage or, if all else fails, default and save their money for a rent deposit while the lender goes through the foreclosure process. As a last resort, these types of borrowers can declare bankruptcy and have their debts forgiven or reduced in a manageable payment plan. Bankruptcy courts will not allow debtors to be made homeless just because they can't pay their creditors.

But if the borrower of an education loan is late with a payment or goes into default, according to Andrew Martin of *The New York Times*, the lender

can levy penalties up to 25 percent of the balance and legally increase the interest rate to several times the original rate.

The education loan borrower cannot refinance at a lower rate, cannot pledge property to satisfy the loan, and cannot have the loan forgiven in bankruptcy.

So let's stop calling this system "student loans," a phrase that evokes an image of college-age kids borrowing a little spending money while they work their way through school. It's *education debt*. The present system is broken and is turning former students into indentured servants.

"This is personal," Sen. Elizabeth Warren said before the Senate last May when she introduced a bill that would have allowed education debtors to refinance their loans. "I grew up in an America that made it a priority to invest in young people," Warren said. "I believe in that America—an America that puts students ahead of billionaires."

Changing this system must begin with recognizing and changing the assumptions and attitudes that got us here.

Reset the Balance

Our nation needs people who enroll in higher education to learn specialized skills, gain specialized knowledge, and lead society to a greater understanding of the wider world. Public colleges and universities were established to provide tax support for an educated citizenry. Private donors funded



The federal government has turned into a collection agency for education debt.

(and got naming rights to) professorships and scholarship funds for the same reason.

Starting with the GI Bill after World War II, continuing with the National Defense Education Act in 1958 (which funded teacher education to meet a national shortage), through the War on Poverty in the mid-1960s that established subsidized loans and grants, Congress and the president agreed that the nation had a stake in helping people go to college. For the most part, what and where students studied was their choice, although some programs rewarded doctors or teachers who worked in underserved communities.

But the loan program was a new funding approach, giving money to individuals instead of institutions. An unintended consequence was the idea that education mainly benefits individuals, rather than society as a whole. Beginning in the late 1970s, with rumors that recent medical and law school graduates were declaring bankruptcy to avoid their large loans, Congress began cutting back. In a series of laws over the next 25 to 30 years, Congress reduced bankruptcy protection for federally financed education loans. In 2005, nearly all private loans were excluded from protection as well.

More recently, funding for educational institutions has also been cut. From 2000 to 2013, income for U.S. universities shifted from mostly public support to nearly half coming from tuition.

According to *The Economist*, "Universities have passed on most of their rising costs to students." For public universities, the average cost for in-state students is \$8,400; it's more than \$19,000 for out-of-state students. The average private-school tuition is greater than \$30,000 per year.

This shift is having a measurable effect. The federal Consumer Financial Protection Board held public hearings on the impact of education debt and published its findings in May 2013. In addition to the economic impacts of delayed home buying and reduced consumer borrowing, the report commented on the growing social costs of high indebtedness of educated people: "The United States

faces a critical shortage of primary [health] care providers. ... High debt burdens can impact a medical student's choice of practice area, leading some to abandon geriatrics and family medicine in favor of more lucrative specialties, exacerbating the primary care shortage."

Education debt also directly affects churches. Sixty-seven seminaries in the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) are participating in research funded by the Lilly Endowment to define the economic challenges faced by seminary students and graduates. Daniel Aleshire, executive director of ATS, explains that clergy with higher debts need and expect higher salaries. This puts pressure on congregations to funnel more of their contributions in that direction, potentially forcing clergy to "compromise their moral and religious authority to lead," he says.

Aleshire urged the project committee to wrestle with the dilemma. "If we act as institutions and individuals as if there is not enough," Aleshire says, "then we ignore the reality that God has the resources to accomplish God's purposes. If we think we will solve the problem, we fail to recognize its enduring complexity. If we do nothing about it, we fail to be faithful."

How to restore the balance of public vs. individual support for higher education, including seminaries? First, increase tax support for public higher education,

including scholarships and grants. Second, increase congregation and denomination support for seminaries and ministerial candidates. Third, encourage wealthy individuals, through tax policies as well as public opinion, to return to the practice of funding professorships and scholarship funds instead of putting their money and names on buildings and sports arenas whose maintenance simply adds to the cost of education.

Treating Debtors as Profit Sources

If you shift the burden of paying for education from public money to individual students and then view their debts as a source of profit and their earning capacity as an asset for their lenders, the result is a form of debt slavery.

News stories and media features often treat “the student loan problem” as a personal-finance issue. Suze Orman, author of *The Money Class*, warns that the system is stacked against borrowers of education loans. “When you don’t pay [loans] back, [the lenders] are thrilled, because it starts to compound and compound and compound, and \$40,000 turns into \$80,000 turns into \$150,000,” Orman told an audience at George Washington University in 2012. She noted that struggling debtors can sometimes get their loans deferred, but the interest keeps piling up.

The federal government has turned into a collection agency for education debt. The Educational Credit Management Corporation is a nonprofit corporation with an exclusive government contract to service loans for 25 lending agencies and the U.S. Department of Education. It has been criticized increasingly for predatory lending practices, harassment of debtors, and rigid pursuit of collections even in the face of court rulings of hardship or sufficient payment of debt.

Consider the case of Thomas. He borrowed a modest \$1,500 to get a medical technician certificate. He finished the course, but he never got a job in the field. He has had a number of minimum-wage jobs, but he has been unemployed and underemployed for much of the time since he got his certificate. In the meantime, he has paid back more than the principal of the loan and still owes \$1,500. Because of sporadic payments, the interest rate on his loan has gone up to 35 percent and his debt continues to grow.

6 Steps to Fix Abuse in the Credit Process

1. Restore the right of debtors to have education loans reduced or discharged in bankruptcy.

2. Allow for refinancing and establishing extended payment plans (without interest accrual) for all education loans, including those from private lenders and those with irregular payment histories.

3. Cap the penalties and interest rates on education loans, and establish a cutoff point of total expense not to exceed double the amount of the original principal. It should be retroactive, especially for debts more than 15 years old.

4. Apply all consumer credit restrictions and requirements to lenders and collection agencies of education loans, including private loans.

5. Restrict education debt collectors’ access to federal payments such as Social Security, income tax refunds, and earned income credits, especially without due process.

6. Create more opportunities for debtors who are paying exorbitant penalties and interest rates under previous rules to reduce or discharge their debts and shorten their payment periods. —VG

Thomas was behind in making child-support payments to the mother of his 2-year-old son and had promised to give her his income tax refund for a deposit on a rental apartment, as she and the boy were homeless. The federal government withheld his refund and applied it to his education debt instead.

And that’s not the only funds the federal government can withhold. According to *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, the federal government withheld all or part of the monthly Social Security payments of 155,000 retirees in 2013 to pay off student

loans, up from just 31,000 in 2002.

The federal government is profiting from this rigorous debt collection, when it ought to be supporting students’ hard work.

As We Forgive Our Debtors

Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister of First Congregational United Church of Christ in Columbus, Ohio, began a social justice project with young adult church members. After a general discussion about what issue to tackle, Ahrens finally asked, “What makes you angry?”

The answer was student debt. The young people felt betrayed by a society that encourages people to “get an education,” offers so-called help through loans, and then imposes unanticipated higher costs as soon as they graduate. “For millennials, their whole life story is caught up in this debt,” said Ahrens, who is 57.

Looming debt has affected their choice of career, their ability to tithe to the church, and their relationship with the congregation. Recently, the group has begun talking about the biblical concept of Jubilee. Ahrens points out that “the actual words used in the Lord’s Prayer are ‘debt’ *ta opheimata* and ‘debtors’ *tois opheiletais* (Matthew 6:12 and Luke 11:4).” The words refer to “the forgiveness of a slave debt,” Ahrens wrote.

The education debt system in the U.S. is a moral crisis. Ethicist Obery M. Hendricks says the plight of debtors in the gospels “was not just an unfortunate unfolding of the natural scheme of things; it was unjust and against the law of God. ... In other words, the people’s poverty was not the result of laziness or incompetence; it was the result of the greed of others. To be poor while others are rich, and to have to pay to borrow what should be freely lent, if not freely given, is not the way of God’s kingdom.”

It’s not the way of the U.S., either.

Driving people who strive to be educated into poverty and debt slavery is not good for the country—not for its economy, not for the health and well-being of its citizenry, not for a well-functioning government, and not for a socially conscious church. ■

Virginia Gilbert was a journalist at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch for 27 years before entering seminary and pursuing a career as a Christian writer.



A bronze statue of Nelson Mandela stands outside Groot Drakenstein prison, about 55 miles from Cape Town, where Mandela spent the last 18 months of his 27-year imprisonment.

NEITHER DESPAIR nor COMPLACENCY

Nelson Mandela was one of the 20th century's greatest leaders, but the long walk to freedom in South Africa is far from over • by CHARLES VILLA-VICENCIO

IN JUNE 1966, Sen. Robert Kennedy joined the National Union of South African Students for a conference held in Cape Town. Tension was running high. NUSAS president Ian Robertson had been banned under the Suppression of Communism Act, and the pressure was on Kennedy, from both the apartheid government and sectors of the anti-apartheid movement, not to attend.

Kennedy went anyway and delivered one of the best speeches of his career. "Few have the greatness to bend history itself," Kennedy reminded the students. "But each time a [person] stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, [s/he] sends forth a tiny ripple of hope ... daring those ripples to build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

Gianluigi Guercia/AFP/Getty Images

Herein lay Mandela's
greatness: hard-won
authenticity rather
than naked power.

Twenty-eight years later Nelson Mandela became the first democratically elected president of South Africa. The West embraced him, celebrating his magnanimity, “disremembering” the support it gave to the very apartheid regime Mandela worked to dismantle.

In the years that followed, Mandela’s leadership enabled a country to project itself beyond the cognitive illusion that suggested there was no way out of a pending Armageddon. He insisted that things only seem impossible until there is the will to make them possible. He created and energized that will, injecting optimism and political excitement into a desperate situation. When an overenthusiastic supporter called Mandela a “saint,” he responded, “No, just a sinner who keeps trying.”

At the time of Kennedy’s 1966 speech, however, Nelson Mandela was in prison, serving a life sentence for sabotage under apartheid; no one realized he was among the “few” who would succeed in bending history. And as we know now, there are certain things that even Mandela could not do.

THE GENIUS OF Mandela’s leadership was his willingness to charm the timid, lure the wayward, disarm his enemies, entice the reluctant, and, yes, bully the recalcitrant to accept his leadership. He worked with others in the “broad church” that was the African National Congress (ANC), which included nationalists, communists, and would-be capitalists, as well as with the apartheid government and, above all, his fellow South Africans. He built and nurtured local and global support, doing the hard work required to persuade the white minority government to surrender power and the apartheid generals to lay down their arms. Herein lay Mandela’s greatness: hard-won authenticity rather than naked power. To use Martin Luther King Jr.’s words, Mandela understood that “power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic.”

Yet Mandela was a leader who tempered moral idealism with political realism, a statesperson who balanced human rights and state security in a manner that was always going to result in criticism. When Mandela assumed the presidency in 1994, some feared “Mandela the radical” while others soon felt he had deviated from the radical commitment to human rights for

which they had hoped. Mandela recognized that a first step toward peace involved the creation of a “minimally decent society.” His priority was to steady the ship at home and elsewhere in Africa; without this there would be no human rights for anyone.

And Mandela led by example. He told South Africans, black and white, that a new age was upon them and that he expected both to adjust their behavior accordingly. In his person and policies, he embodied that new age, committing himself to a nonlitigious, restorative, conciliatory exercise in nation-building. In pursuit of this ideal, Mandela rejected spurious peace offers from those who sought to promote a refined version of the old order and sought reconciliation in the face of an understandable impulse for revenge. While Amnesty International and other international agencies called for the

economic empowerment, affirmative action, and related initiatives. But the social democrats, socialists, others on the Left, and the pragmatists in the ANC were outgunned by economists who favored a free-market capitalist economy, thus limiting the scope for pursuing redistributive economic and social policies.

Today, most whites continue to live extremely comfortable and secure lives in South Africa. There is a comparatively small, emergent, first generation of black middle-class citizens doing well but remaining vulnerable in a teetering economy. There is also a small black elite that has established itself alongside an entrenched white economic elite. Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu suggests that the economic gravy train stopped just long enough for a few blacks to get on board before departing the station,

When an overenthusiastic supporter called Mandela a “saint,” he responded, “No, just a sinner who keeps trying.”

prosecution of apartheid criminals, South Africa instead offered perpetrators a carefully constructed conditional amnesty, as a foundation for political reconciliation based on truth-telling and national reconstruction. South Africa had no lustration policy, no Tokyo tribunals or Nuremberg trials. It is an approach that some anti-apartheid activists, in South Africa and beyond, continue to find a bitter pill to swallow.

MANDELA GOT THE nuances of leadership right: He drew the country’s diverse groups into a heroic settlement; he understood and responded to minority interests; he pragmatically pursued restoration, not revenge. Why then, you may ask, do things seem to be going so horribly wrong in South Africa today?

When apartheid ended, black South Africans needed to be drawn into the economy. Whites, who owned the economy, needed to be placated, and foreign investors required reassurance that their investments were safe. The solution involved drawing black leaders and ANC supporters into the mainstream economy through black

leaving the destitute poor on the platform, where they vacillate between intensified anger and resignation.

Bluntly stated, while still characterized by gross racial inequality, South Africa has traded its naked racist profile of the past for a class-based society that is likely to be more difficult to overcome than apartheid.

The ending of formal apartheid was a crucial step forward. However, structural and institutional racism, extending from personal bias to material privilege, inevitably continues beyond the abolition of apartheid. As the immediate threat of revolution subsided in 1994, we reverted back to a brand of “normality” that carried within itself too many vestiges of the past, forgetting that what is needed is a “new normality.” In other words, structural racial advantage no longer needed apartheid laws to reproduce economic privilege. It is one thing to end segregation by law; it is another thing to end de facto segregation.

As a result, the national mindset in South Africa today is very different from what it was in the Mandela days. The president, together with some in his inner circle, live



People sing during the "Nelson Mandela: A Life Celebrated" memorial service at Cape Town Stadium in December 2013, a week after his death.

in scandalous extravagance while continuing to evoke the Mandela legacy as a ruse to distract from their own moral failings and the increasing loss of confidence in government. Men and women who constitute an emerging class of millionaire tycoons resist government economic regulation and corporate social responsibility, while trade unions shut down mines and industry with paralyzing strikes. The unemployed occupy the cities, bring traffic to a standstill, and destroy the infrastructure of the townships.

Mandela could inspire and lure, but he could not command the economy to grow, force the rich to share, insist that the poor be patient, or order the war against poverty to be won. He could not force successive leaders or even well-meaning citizens to follow his example. An African proverb says it takes a village to raise a child; it takes a nation to build a social order. This nation includes successive presidents, cabinet ministers, civil servants, security officials, faith communities, and grassroots people, as well as ill-disciplined police and self-centered individuals, who refuse to look beyond self-privilege and extravagance.

Analysts warn that South Africa is a ticking time bomb; perhaps it will go off as a series of smaller landmines and grassfires. We are a restless people.

FORMER NEW YORK Gov. Mario Cuomo, who died earlier this year, once said that political parties campaign in poetry but govern in prose. The poetry of South Africa's years of struggle has grown dim.

We remember only the distant refrains of our movement for democracy and have failed to introduce effectively the necessary verbs, adverbs, and adjectives needed to create viable political prose.

We need to rediscover the deeper meaning and connection between reconciliation and national reconstruction that was at the heart of the Mandela dream. This vision is embedded in the roots of our religious and secular legacies, but if it is taken seriously, it calls into question the lifestyles of both current political leaders and those in the top echelons of business. Mandela could, by virtue of his authentic leadership, contain the seething contradictions of our young and restless democracy; the current leaders are proving their inability to do so.

In 1968, Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah published a disturbing novel, set in the wake of the coup d'état that removed then-president Kwame Nkrumah from office. Corruption was rife and greed endemic. Armah gave his novel an evocative title: *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. South Africa is not where Ghana once was, yet we too await the realization of our dream. At times we speak of South African exceptionalism, imagining we can bypass the traumas of Africa. That is not so, and yet there is political space in South Africa for dissidents, opponents of government, and the poor to make their voices heard, but at a price.

Fearing the loss of power, the government is making increasing demands for submission, acquiescence, and obedience; abuses by

security forces seem to be escalating. Other nations, not least those on the African continent, have allowed their hard-won democratic victories to fall victim to oppressive laws and practices, often with the tacit acceptance of citizens who benefit from abusive government policies. South Africa dare not go there.

The good news is that there is brooding discontent in the ruling party. The constitution is threatened by some but remains fully intact, and we have an extremely brave public protector in the person of Thuli Madonsela, who gives President Zuma sleepless nights, and a constitutional court that has blown the whistle on government misconduct. So the struggle continues.

In 1994, Nelson Mandela delivered these remarks before the Organization of African Unity summit meeting: "We must face the matter squarely that where there is something wrong in how we govern ourselves, it must be said that the fault is not in our stars but in ourselves that we are ill-governed." He continued, "we have it in ourselves as Africans to change all this." His bequest to us is an antidote to both despair and complacency. It is to deal with our challenges. We have done so before and we will do so again. ■

Charles Villa-Vicencio is a South African theologian and a leading global expert on transitional justice and political reconciliation. This article is adapted with permission from a lecture he gave last October at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., where he is a visiting professor in the Conflict Resolution Program.

THE BEATITUDES

Sojourners invited some of our favorite contemporary authors—religious and otherwise—to offer their reflections on the beatitudes. Third in a series.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”

—Matthew 5:7

Mercy Me

In the gospels, at least, not a sparrow falls to the ground without God's attune.

by JOSH MacIVOR-ANDERSEN

I STOLE MY brother's pellet rifle when I was 6 because it was an upgrade from our old lever-action BB gun. I just wanted to hold it, to feel its heft.

I put a single pellet from a plastic tray in the chamber, the same way I had seen him do it, set the tray on the ground and cocked the gun with a click and a click. I pumped the forestock until the gun felt air-filled and lethal.

I wondered if it would hurt my shoulder. The kickback.

I leaned my head toward the barrel and closed one eye and leveled the gun at the thick canopy of a crab apple tree growing too close to the barn. The gun gave a swift exhale, and the pellet thwacked into the branches.

A second later, a red-breasted robin tumbled from the tree.

I could say I heard it thump to the ground, but that would be stretching my memory to the point of fictionalizing. I can't remember if it made an audible sound when it hit. But I remember vividly, as clear as the buzz of this morning's traffic, the sound of its wings swishing against the grass and forget-me-nots, and its desperate squawking, as if asking itself why its body was no longer listening to the commands of its mind, and why this sudden sharp pain in its center.

I was outside on a farm in upstate New York with a pellet gun I wasn't supposed to touch. I had felled a bird without intention or purpose, without wanting to hurt anything. So I went to it, stood over its little fluttering body, and fumbled another pellet into the chamber, pressed the barrel to the bird, clamped my tear-filled eyes tightly closed, and pulled the trigger again.

Still, the scream, like the frantic ringing of some serrated bell. The wild flapping. The attempt to fly away from whatever invisible horror had pinned its body to the ground.

Another pellet, another pull of the trigger. And

then another. And then another.

It was a mercy killing, said Mom when I was curled in her arms, sobbing, later that day. That's what it was asking for. It was a mercy.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, in your mercy, please disregard the unending lapses in our own, the botched attempts, the birds we didn't aim for with lead-heavy breasts.

Lord, in your mercy, please short-circuit the mechanism of reciprocity in your beatitude. We will never get it right. We will never summon enough to unlock the requisite deluge.

WHEN MOM WAS a toddler, my grandmother put her in a leather harness and tethered her to the clothesline so she wouldn't waddle away after my grandfather, who was off with the cows in the fields. The dog, Pluto, whose territory had been invaded, sat in a pile nearby, panting. My mother worked up and down the line, picking every forget-me-not she could reach, placing them gently in the dog's fur until the animal was covered.

From a distance, the dog looked as if it were smoldering in a bright blue fire, shot through with yellow sparks.

Certain legends say the precise blue of the forget-me-not was the last remnant in the palette when God named and colored all of earth's flowers, gave each pistil and petal its own hue. As God was closing shop, the work for the day finished, God heard the tiny whisper of a star-lobed blossom, as colorless as the vacuum of space. Completely unnamed.

Forget me not, O Lord!

And the God of the cosmos, whose hearing stretches to the scorched edges of an expanding, roaring, honeycombed universe, heard the whisper of one of the smallest earth-anchored flowers, and God's face

Illustration by M.P. Wiggins



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bent to the ground.

This shall be your name, bellowed God, brushing the last shard of blue over the petals. This shall be your color.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer, as our species is bankrupt and reeling.

Lord, in your mercy, see that those lacking it are going for everyone's throats, and with the constriction and cutting all your creation can manage is a whisper and we are whispering through compromised airways for more mercy.

SOMETIMES AT NIGHT I try to align the beating of my heart with the ancient prayers of those desperate to catch the attention of the carpenter king: the 10 lepers huddled together on the border between Samaria and Galilee, the Canaanite mother whose daughter housed demons, the pilgrim pressing east wanting nothing more than to pray without ceasing: *Kyrie eleison*—Lord, have mercy.

And how cavernous the pulsing of our own hearts in silence.

And how fast mine beats through the insomnia these days, through those moments, minutes, hours when the universe expands in my mind to unbearable lengths and heft.

And how I fail to fit the whole Eastern prayer within each beat—Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me—because the heart-pound is a fast staccato, and I mostly just say mercy, mercy, mercy until the sun starts to peer around the corners of the earth, the window shades. A brand-new day.

IN THE LAST 365 days, 35 men and women in the U.S. were executed (eventually) by lethal injection. The oldest, John Henry, was 63. The youngest, Anthony Doyle, was 29. The request for mercy from a prisoner facing imminent death is sometimes desperate, sometimes composed, followed by the legalese of professionals whose job it is to seek clemency or defend against it, then the hushed decision of a governor behind closed doors, and finally the cacophony of a mostly derelict media hissing and buzzing and rattling off the verdict and final hours.

In the last 365 days, a dozen mothers and fathers have looked through television cameras into the eyes of men hell-bent on heaven, men with knives poised at the throats of their children, and begged for

mercy. Language hiccups to describe the request of a mother for the life of her child.

In the last 365 days, one man with an officer's arm wrapped tightly around his neck wheezed 11 pleas for mercy as the asphyxia set in. They were quiet requests, desperate, ultimately dishonored.

I cannot speak of school children in Pakistan, or the teachers who tried to shield them.

At night I imagine each petition drifting to the ears of God who, in the gospels, at least, never once denied a request for mercy. In the gospels, at least, not a sparrow falls to the ground without God's attune.

I RECENTLY CALLED Mom to make sure I had my facts right. Leather harness, right? Some kind of leash? Indeed. They used to make and market them for the restriction of children prone to wander. My mom was prone to wander.

Pluto the pup, right? Yes, Grandpa named all the German short-haired pointers Pluto to simplify the sending out and rounding up on a 700-acre dairy farm. Pluto slept right through the flowering, she said. He had no sense of his new blanket until he awoke, shaking off the color like flung sparks.

But the blossoms, so vividly forget-me-nots in my imagined version of her story, as well as my own: Violets, she said. They were violets. And by the barn where the bird fell, probably Queen Anne's lace. Forget-me-nots tend to grow closer to water, she said. Rivers and creeks and ditches.

"The mouse-ear forget-me-not, *Myosotis laxa*, has now extended its racemes very much, and hangs over the edge of the brook," wrote Thoreau from his forested perch. "It is the more beautiful for being small and unpretending; even flowers must be modest."

Lord, in your mercy, hear our modest prayer, and hear it, even, from a man who has shown mercy in fragments, sometimes none, sometime more.

I killed the bird, Lord. Forget me not. Remember your promises. ■

Josh MacIvor-Andersen teaches writing at Northern Michigan University and has contributed essays to *Paris Review Daily*, *Ruminant*, *Gulf Coast*, and *Fourth Genre*, among others.

All Eyes Are Upon Us

*Mother, mother
There's too many of you crying
Brother, brother, brother
There's far too many of you dying*
—Marvin Gaye

then they stomped

John Willet

as he lay on the sidewalk
hands cuffed behind his back
and shot

Michael Brown

who was on his way this fall to college

Stop and frisk

Stop and frisk

and used a chokehold to kill

Eric Garner

who sold cigarettes one-by-one
on the street in Staten Island
and punched again, again
in the face
great-grandmother

Marlene Pinnock

as she lay on the ground
then they stood around while
an angry bartender
pushed vet

William Sager

down the stairs to his death;
maybe helped hide
the security videotape
then it was
unarmed

Dillon Taylor

in Salt Lake City, and
homeless

James Boyd

in Albuquerque

and Darrien Hunt

in Saratoga Springs, Utah—

Michael Brown is
mourned at a vigil in
Webster Grove, Mo.



Jim Young/Reuters

how about that grandmother
92-year-old

Kathryn Johnston

shot to death in a SWAT team raid
gone bad?
in '73 in Dallas

Santos Rodríguez

was marked by officer Cain
who played Russian Roulette
with the handcuffed 12-year-old
in his cruiser—
till the .357 fired; Santos' blood
all over his 13-year-old handcuffed
brother David

and those cries of
19-month-old Bounkham Phonesavanh
in whose crib
the flash-bang grenade exploded

Shelter in place

Shelter in place

or 41 police gunshots at immigrant

Amadou Diallo

who died
right there
in the doorway
of his Brx. apt. bldg.

and that cop who shot and killed
7-year-old

Aiyana Stanley-Jones

as she slept
and those Cleveland cops who shot
12-year-old

Tamir Rice

who had a BB gun
and gave him no first aid—
watched him die

all those police
with gas masks and helmets in

Ferguson, Missouri

telling the people

don't be on the streets after sundown

Ferguson—still a sundown town

maybe soon like a town near you

with M-16s, MRAPs
armored personnel carriers—
in this war against the people

Lockdown
Lockdown

*Gene Grabiner is a SUNY distinguished
service professor emeritus in Buffalo, N.Y.*

#BlackLivesMatter Meet Stokely Carmichael

IN AN undistinguished apartment around the corner from my house in Columbia Heights, the Black Power revolutionary Stokely Carmichael honed his forceful, insistent rhetoric and organizing genius. His apartment effectively served as the Washington, D.C. headquarters for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Historian Peniel E. Joseph's recently released Carmichael biography, *Stokely: A Life*, traces this complicated American revolutionary with nuance and freshness critical in our era of resurging black youth-led movements. Regarding Carmichael's D.C. years, Joseph describes the intellectual crucible that was Howard University at the time.

The Caribbean-born, Harlem-raised Carmichael lived in D.C. from 1960, when he enrolled at Howard as a philosophy major, to 1965, when he relocated to Lowndes County, Ala., as a fulltime organizer for the black



fire with possibility. Carmichael's freshman English teacher was future Nobel Prize-winning author Toni Morrison. Poet Sterling Brown, called "the dean of Negro literature," mentored Carmichael, urging him to pay "attention to the voices of not just the dignified but also the damned."

During Carmichael's sophomore year, Howard hosted Bayard Rustin and Malcolm X for their famous debate, "Integration or Separation." Between classes, Carmichael helped lead a contingent of 200 Howard students to desegregate restaurants and public facilities along Route 40, between D.C. and Baltimore. During "vacations," Carmichael registered black voters in Mississippi and Alabama, habitually spending his late June birthday in jail.

It was from Alabama that Carmichael's voice definitively broke through to the national level. After the march from Selma to Montgomery and the Klan murder of Viola Liuzzo, Carmichael stayed on in Lowndes County to organize in the churches. He formed the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, which chose a black panther as its symbol, "noting the animal's color and ability to defend itself," writes Joseph.

"Stokely Carmichael's belief that black political power resided in the will and

political self-determination of local people helped to create the original Black Panther Party ... for promoting radical democracy in Alabama," says Joseph. When black voters successfully got a Black Panther candidate on the Lowndes County ballot in November 1966, a major political victory had been won. Carmichael, with his calls for more and greater and consolidated "black power," had broken the white Democratic electoral machine in the South: An independent black political party had been formed.

In James Cone's 1969 book, *Black Theology and Black Power*, he defines black power as "complete emancipation of black people from white oppression by whatever means black people deem necessary." Elsewhere he defines black liberation theology as an attempt "to teach people how to be unapologetically black and Christian at the same time." Cone goes on to say "the main difficulty which most whites have with Black Power and its relationship to the Christian gospel stems from their own inability to translate traditional theological language into the life situation of black people." The national uprisings in Florida, Missouri, and New York are part of an ongoing black liberation narrative.

In the distorted racialized imagination of America, white Christians must confront the notion that our salvation comes through a black Jesus. Will we stand at the foot of the cross and the lynching tree, as Cone puts it, and ponder their power, accepting the profound discomfort we find there? Will white Christians who say #BlackLivesMatter also embrace #BlackPowerNow? ■

Rose Marie Berger, a Sojourners senior associate editor, is a Catholic peace activist and poet.

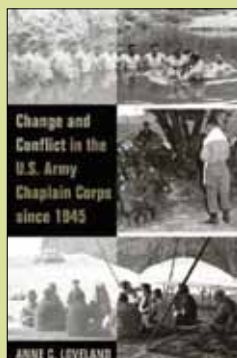


These national uprisings are part of an ongoing black liberation narrative.

freedom struggle. For five critical years, Carmichael—who was raised Methodist and would later found the Black Panthers and become a leading anti-colonial, pan-Africanist living in Guinea (changing his name to Kwame Touré)—honed his organizing skills and revolutionary perspective from his student apartment on Euclid Street.

The fall of 1960 followed the culmination of the first wave of sit-ins sparked by the North Carolina A&T students in Greensboro. Ella Baker had encouraged students to break from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and form their own youth-led organization, which became SNCC. Black campuses, including Howard, were on

HISTORY



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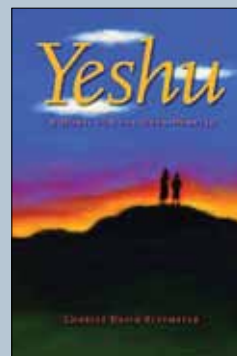
Anne C. Loveland
University of Tennessee Press
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Shows how and why the role of U.S. army chaplains and the Chaplain Corps changed in the wake of religious and cultural upheaval in American society and momentous changes in U.S. military policy.



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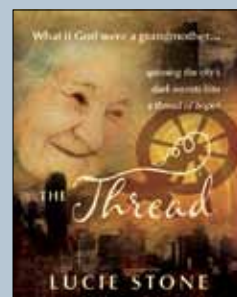
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On March 30, 1981, Jerry Parr was thrust out of the background and into the history books when a gunman attempted to kill President Reagan. Don't miss this thrilling spiritual autobiography of a Secret Service agent.

FICTION



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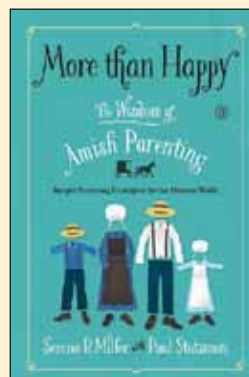
Charles David Kleymeyer
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In this fresh retelling of the Jesus saga, a Jewish, storytelling carpenter touches humankind forever, and a wilderness wanderer connects nature with the spirit. Lyrical, interfaith, intergenerational. Winner: three national fiction prizes in 2014. YeshuNovel.com



The Thread

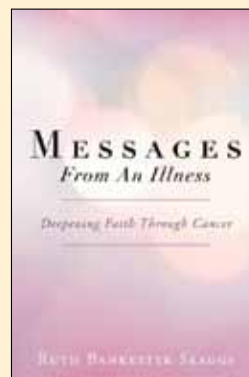
Lucie Stone
Anamchara Books
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In the tradition of *The Shack*, Madeleine L'Engle, and George MacDonald, this urban fantasy shines with the unconditional love and unexpected grace of the Trinity, lighting even the terrifying shadows of sexual abuse and murder.

HEALTH AND LIFE



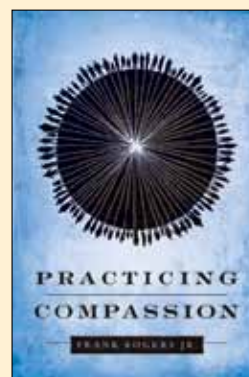
More than Happy

Serena B. Miller with Paul Stutzman
Howard Books
HowardBooksonline.com
In the tradition of *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, this new book is an in-depth look at the practices and principles of Amish parents and how they raise children who are self-sufficient, hard-working, and remarkably happy.



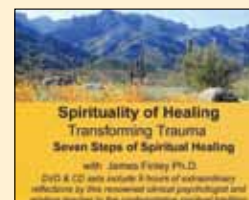
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Ruth Bankester Skaggs
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WestbowPress.com
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Practicing Compassion

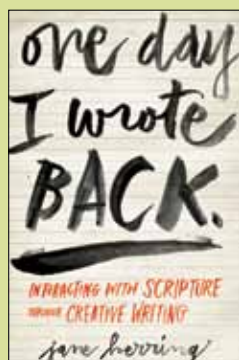
Frank Rogers Jr.
Fresh Air Books
Bookstore.UpperRoom.org/
Products/FA525/practicing-compassion.aspx
Through rich and moving stories of people from various faiths, Frank Rogers shows ways to incorporate compassion in our daily lives. His interfaith perspective on mercy, kindness, and caring for one another trains us to Pay attention, Understand empathically, Love with connection, Sense the sacredness, and Embody new life.



Spirituality of Healing

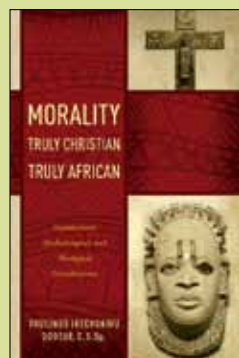
James Finley, Ph.D.
Contemplative Life Bookstore
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james-finley/james-finley-conference-2014-dvd-set/
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THEOLOGY



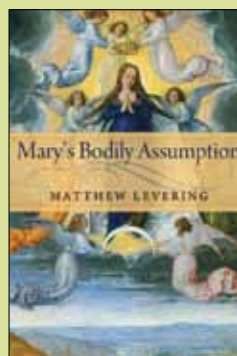
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Jane Herring
Upper Room Books
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Do you struggle to relate the Bible to your daily life? Jane Herring wrestled with the contradictions, puzzling stories, and difficult sayings in scripture—until she discovered the power of interacting with them.



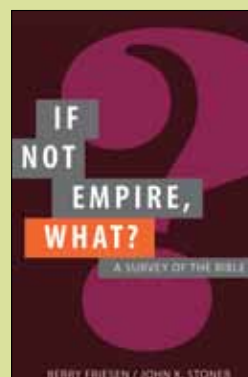
Morality Truly Christian, Truly African: Foundational, Methodological, and Theological Considerations

Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, C.S.Sp.
University of Notre Dame Press
UNDPress.nd.edu
"Odozor has produced a definitive study that will determine the future of theological conversations about the place of African moral theology in world Christianity."
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Mary's Bodily Assumption

Matthew Levering
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UNDPress.nd.edu
In *Mary's Bodily Assumption*, Matthew Levering presents a contemporary explanation and defense of the Catholic doctrine of Mary's bodily Assumption.



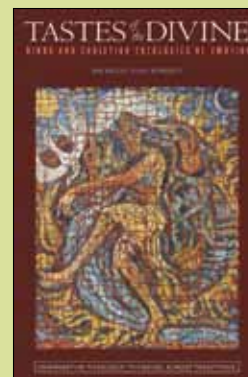
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Berry Friesen and John K. Stoner
www.Bible-and-Empire.net
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Dark Light of Love

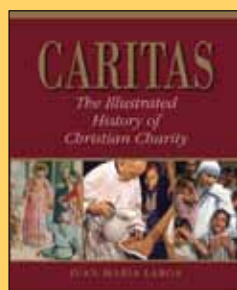
John S. Dunne
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Tastes of the Divine

Michelle Voss Roberts
Fordham University Press
go.wfu.edu/tastesofthedivine
This new work of comparative theology illuminates emotion as a place of interreligious encounter. It draws on Indian aesthetic theory to discern the theological significance of meditative peace, devotional love, and prophetic anger.

SOCIAL JUSTICE



Caritas: The Illustrated History of Christian Charity

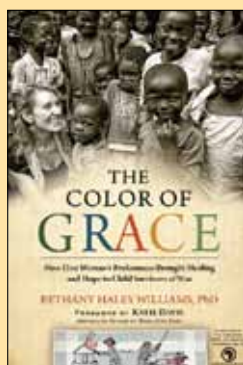
Juan María Laboa
Paulist Press
PaulistPress.com
A richly illustrated journey through Christian love, starting with the life of Jesus up to and including the teachings of Pope Francis.



Counter Culture

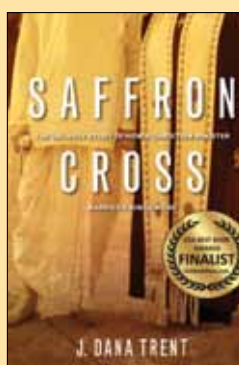
David Platt
Tyndale House Publishers
CounterCulturebook.com
In his book *Counter Culture*, David Platt calls Christians to actively take a stand on such issues as poverty, sex-trafficking, marriage, abortion, racism, and religious liberty—all the while being passionate, unwavering voices for Christ.

MEMOIR



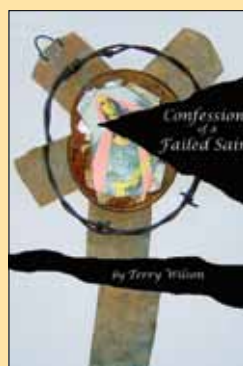
The Color of Grace

Bethany Haley Williams
Howard Books
ColorofGracebook.com
Author and psychologist Bethany Haley Williams shares how her own emotional healing led her into treacherous African war zones, where she provides care to former child soldiers and young girls used as sex slaves.



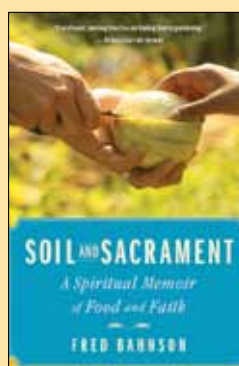
Saffron Cross

J. Dana Trent
Fresh Air Books
Bookstore.UpperRoom.org/Products/FA516/saffron-cross.aspx
A Christian minister and a Hindu monk fall in love and get married. How does this interfaith relationship work? *Saffron Cross* is the intriguing memoir of the relationship between Dana, a Baptist minister, and Fred, a devout Hindu and former monk. The two meet on eHarmony and begin a fascinating, sometimes daunting, but ultimately inspiring journey of interfaith relationship and marriage.



Confessions of a Failed Saint

Terry Wilson
PARSE
Amazon.com
"Wise, Witty, and Hilarious! A pilgrimage guaranteed to strike a chord in the hearts of spiritual seekers everywhere." —Sean Murphy, author of *One Bird, One Stone*. Available on amazon.com



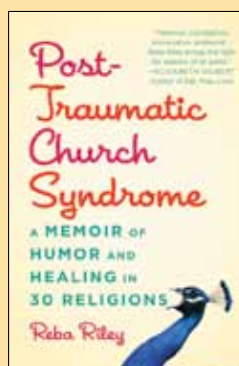
Soil and Sacrament

Fred Bahnson
Simon & Schuster
go.wfu.edu/soilandsacrament
In this lyrical hymn to the soil that sustains us, Bahnson recounts his journey among Trappist monks, Mayan coffee growers, Jewish farmers, and Pentecostal prayer warriors. A book *Kirkus Reviews* called "A profound, moving treatise on finding God in gardening."

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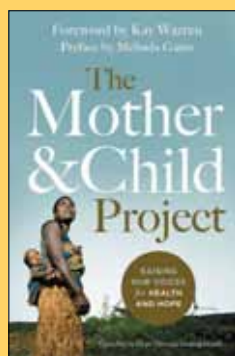
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Stephan Bauman
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THE UNBEARABLE WHITENESS OF BEING

Part of “setting captives free” is helping people see the invisible bonds of structural racism • *by* DOMINIQUE DuBOIS GILLIARD

I WAS ONCE told that “racism is our nation’s original sin.” This statement jolted me. While I didn’t dispute its truth, I have come to realize racism is much more complex than this.

In order to dismantle the structural sin of racism, we have to first set it within a larger context that acknowledges racism’s sociopolitical dependency and structural interconnectedness.

First: “race” is not real. It is not a scientific category; biologically, it does not exist. Race is a social construct, something built systematically. It has no inherent value or true significance beyond what we give it. In order for race to have real social consequences—which it undoubtedly does—there must be other phenomena at work that validate, sustain, and reinforce the social significance of race.

As a result of sin in our fallen world, human

bodies are appraised and given a value based upon certain criteria. As a result of sin, men are privileged over women, white skin is privileged over darker skin, able bodies are privileged over disabled bodies. Historically, certain bodies are acclaimed while others are defamed. Race plays a starring role in this larger drama of embodiment.

Within this racialized schema, whiteness has evolved into an exclusive fraternity. Whiteness has been judicially regulated, legislatively reinforced, and institutionally endowed with power. Whiteness bestows privileges upon its preordained clientele.

While privilege is only one small part of whiteness, and while not all of these privileges are realized (or even equally distributed throughout its membership), these privileges are uniquely accessible to its members.

Illustration by Steve Cup

Instead of seeing each other as image bearers of God, we see each other as competition for the spoils of American Empire.



It's important to note that whiteness is not the only operative privilege; there is also privilege associated with gender, class, nationality, and able-bodiedness—and thus privilege should be understood as stackable, meaning that many individuals possess multiple privileges. Nevertheless, it is vital to understand that not all privileges hold the same historical weight, value, and social significance. Whiteness is expansive. Social stratifications such as gender, class, and nationality function within it. Whiteness is a social sentinel; it names boundaries and polices purity.

RACISM IS PART of our nation's anatomy; we are and have always been a racialized nation. Race and racism operate within and as part of our nation's racialized imagination. Subtly, race has been encoded within our moral language. Whiteness is associated with citizenship, integrity, and "law and order," while darker pigmentation is linked to otherness, suspicion, criminality, and deviance. As study after study has shown, this racialized logic grants whiteness moral and ethical superiority, creating a hierarchy that—consciously or unconsciously—profoundly shapes racial outcomes, socioeconomic disparities, and access to positions of power.

Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, illuminates the relationship between race, legislation, policing, and incarceration. She writes: "Arguably the most important parallel between mass incarceration and Jim Crow is that both have served to define the meaning and significance of race in America. Indeed, a primary function of any racial caste system is to define the meaning of race in its time. Slavery defined what it meant to be black (a slave), and Jim Crow defined what it meant to be black (a second-class citizen). Today mass incarceration defines the meaning of blackness in America: Black people, especially black men, are criminals. That is what it means to be black." Her crystallized "meaning of blackness in America" is what both legitimates the killing of unarmed African Americans and undergirds the nationwide protest professing #BlackLivesMatter.

Ferguson awakened the nation from a colorblind stupor. It relaunched a national conversation on race. As that conversation unfolds, many are realizing that Ferguson isn't an anomaly: It's a microcosm of our country.

Statistically speaking, Ferguson police arrest black people at a rate nearly three times higher than people of other races. At least 1,581 other police departments across the U.S. arrest black people at rates even more skewed than in Ferguson. *USA Today* found "at least 70 departments scattered from Connecticut to California arrested black people at a rate 10 times higher than people who are not black."

In 2010, the New York Police Department released data indicating nearly 90 percent of the roughly 600,000 people that officers "stopped and frisked" each year were African American and Latino (less than 15 percent of these stops occurred in response to any sign of criminal activity). A 2014 study found that "young black men are 21 times as likely as their white peers to be killed by police." Racism is disproportionately debilitating for non-Euro-American communities, but racism affects everyone.

This is what racism looks and feels like today. This is why "hands up, don't shoot" is both an orchestrated call-and-response mantra and a dangerous taunt—dangerous because of the many examples of police overriding this fundamentally recognized signal of surrender.

Sin has cognitively perverted humanity and, as a consequence, we treat each other as enemies instead of neighbors. Because of the unholy trinity of social stratification—racism, classism, and sexism—we seldom see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. The enduring presence of this injustice isn't simply a stain upon our national legacy—it's also an indictment upon our church. Sin dehumanizes and negates the *Imago Dei* inherent in all human beings. Instead of seeing each other as fellow image bearers, we see each other as competition for the spoils of American Empire. We respond to each other based on a capitalistic logic that pits us against one another, as opposed to a baptismal ethic that calls us into solidarity with one another.

We fear each other, largely because we don't know each other; we don't worship

together, fellowship together. As a result, we don't see our identities as bound together. While there are many reasons for these realities, one of the least discussed is how we have institutionally concealed our murky racial history within triumphalist folklore in both our nation and our church. Until we acknowledge these realities, we will remain unrepentant.

MYTHOLOGY IS a story we tell to uphold a certain belief or practice. It is at the crux of the American Empire. It's strategically deployed to distract citizens from realizing the true foundations of the United States and its prosperity: colonization, genocide, slavery, and exploitative legislation that made it all legal.

Catholic theologian Daniel Groody writes, "Symbolically, empire represents any power that arrogates to itself the power that belongs to God alone, or any group or institution that subjugates the poor and needy for its own advantage." Mythology cultivates a social climate where racism and ethnocentrism are camouflaged under the guise of patriotism. Thus, our national mythology enables rhetoric that stimulates a metanarrative of U.S. exceptionalism. The ability to see ourselves as exceptional—a nation uniquely chosen and favored by God—serves to obscure our history of socio-political and economic corruption. This mythology allows the U.S. to enshroud the criminality, immorality, and oppression that has cultivated gross social inequalities. It valorizes this country's Euro-American forebearers and romanticizes their intentions.

For example, mythology depicts our country's ancestors as innocent, hardworking, moral individuals able to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps through rugged individualism. Consequently, this myth allows some Americans the luxury of self-definition. This self-definition is then exploited to depict our nation as the land of equal opportunity for all, the embodiment of democratic freedom, and the ambassador of justice worldwide—even though it is not.

Through these constructed façades, the U.S. has engendered blind allegiance from the vast majority of its citizenry, while simultaneously and systematically stymieing

marginalized people groups' efforts to disrupt the oppressive status quo. Ferguson and the Occupy Movement are prime examples of this. These two seemingly disconnected movements are inherently linked because they oppose exploitative legislation that targets and decimates the rights and livelihood of marginalized populations. These movements are also connected through our nation's widening wealth gap, along racial and ethnic lines. According to Pew Research Center, "the wealth of white households was 13 times the median wealth of black households in 2013," and more than 10 times that of Latino households.

By successfully rearticulating and institutionalizing oppressive revisionist historical accounts of the U.S. and its evolution into the world's superpower, our nation has aus-

**Out of this kind of pain,
the church has mined
some of its most robust
theological reflection.**

piciously used academia and the media to simultaneously justify its prosperity and ensure that racial minorities, as well as women of all races, remain psychologically vulnerable, siloed, and subjugated. This climate of socioeconomic repression frequently breeds internalized oppression, especially within young, vulnerable, impressionable children who are extremely malleable. These children frequently grow up seeing themselves, their families, communities, and race/ethnicity/gender as "less than." They compare their own lived realities with those afforded the benefits and spoils of the "American Dream."

Every day we are indoctrinated with fabrications about this country's history and its relationship to our present-day gross inequalities. It is a coercive schema akin to victimizing the victim.

As a result, many marginalized minorities encounter a greater propensity to suffer from psychological trauma—the most common manifestations being internalized hatred, suicide, and cognitive dissonance around being both a U.S. citizen and the reality of being treated as less than other citizens.

OUT OF THIS kind of desperation, pain, and lived experience, the church has historically mined some of its richest and most robust theological reflection.

One only has to look at biblical narratives of those on the margins: people such as Hagar (Genesis 16), Zipporah (Numbers 12), and the woman at the well (John 4). Each of these women suffered persecution because of their embodied nature (gender, race-ethnicity, and/or class). These women endured discrimination from both those inside and outside of the church, even church leaders. Nevertheless, God met them in uniquely intimate ways. God affirmed their dignity and the creational intent behind their embodied nature. God restored them into the broader community. God offered a unique response of loving support to these wounded women, showing how we're supposed to respond to the oppressed, victimized, and ostracized members of society as God's people in the world today.

Sadly, this is where our present situation becomes despairingly bleak.

Many churches and religious institutions fail to contextualize and teach the Bible in ways that address corporate sin and structural injustice. Congregants are frequently taught that racism and the institutional oppression that breed gross inequalities are strictly "social problems" that have nothing to do with the gospel. Despite all the good the church has done, its legacy also includes racism, patriarchy, a lack of concern for the poor, and an inability to transcend Eurocentric expressions of our faith.

How will we begin to make amends? We must have authentic conversations about racism, power, and privilege. We'll have to begin distinguishing "Americanisms" from the gospel. We'll need to live out our faith proclamations through our actions. We'll need to exegete society alongside scripture.

Within our own context, giving sight to the blind and setting the captives free means helping people to see how propaganda binds them. Only then can the church become a haven of truth and reformation. ■

Dominique DuBois Gilliard (ctobt.com), a pastor, theologian, and educator, currently serves at New Hope Covenant Church in Oakland, Calif.



By Kimberly Burge

Songs Before the **Cataclysm**

How a punk-rock drummer became a rescuer of ancient Syrian spiritual music.

SOME OF THE WORLD'S oldest spiritual music has been recorded, and thus preserved—just in time—thanks to a punk-rock drummer/photographer.

The ancient city of Aleppo, Syria, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and considered one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Since 2012, when the Syrian civil war moved in to the area, Aleppo has been ravaged by fighting, and many of its inhabitants killed or made refugees.

Several years before the war began, Jason Hamacher embarked on an accidental odyssey to capture the sights and sounds of Aleppo, not knowing he might be the last to do so before the Old City, the historic city center, was destroyed.

Hamacher moved to Washington, D.C., in his teens and spent his high school years exploring a dual identity that would stick: Christian and son of a Southern Baptist preacher, and drummer in D.C.'s vibrant hardcore punk scene. Since 1993, he has recorded and toured

Above: Recording Sufi music in a 500-year-old house in Aleppo's old city. **At right:** Hamacher standing in front of a 3,500-year-old lion statue at the Hittite Ain Dara temple in northern Syria.

Jason Hamacher



Inside CultureWatch

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C. Christopher Smith reviews *This is My Body*

specific instructions to give to a taxi driver in order to reach the right church.

Hamacher wasn't ready to take off for Syria yet. Instead, he found an email address for the Syrian Orthodox Church and wrote to explain what he was seeking. The email turned out to belong to the office of the archbishop in the U.S., who was intrigued by Hamacher's interest and invited him to New York for a discussion. Hamacher was game, though a bit intimidated by the formality of his host's office.

"I was Googling 'how to address an archbishop,'" he says. "I didn't want to offend anyone. These are the people who voted on the New Testament!"

The U.S. archbishop could not help him, though. He confirmed that recordings of these ancient chants did not exist. Something clicked then for Hamacher. "I said,

wait, you mean there really is no recording? Well, then, do you want *me* to make one?"

With support from the archbishop, Hamacher set out on what he calls his "crash course" in Syrian and Orthodox culture. He was hosted in the home of the archbishop of Aleppo, Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, who introduced him to people throughout the city as well as those who came to call. One morning the people who sought out Archbishop Ibrahim ranged from a struggling widow in need of financial support to a British journalist wanting an interview to Prince Michael of Greece, who stopped by to say hello while visiting Aleppo.

"The archbishop turned to me and said, 'Jason, this is Prince Michael. Tell him what you're doing here.' Again, what do you say to someone like that?" Hamacher invited the prince and his wife to accompany him to hear a choir perform later that night. They accepted, and seemed to enjoy their evening.

"One of the things I learned is that just honestly engaging with someone is how

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New & Noteworthy



GOING IT ALONE

Carolina Chocolate Drops front woman Rhiannon Giddens' new album *Tomorrow Is My Turn* is sometimes folk, sometimes gospel, and occasionally haunting. But whether Giddens is singing of the beauty of black skin, the presence of God, or the love of a partner, she sounds like pure talent and soaring power. Nonesuch

VERSES VS. DEATH

In settings from Abu Ghraib prison to a Quaker meeting to memory, where his father says "My son, you are Arab, be proud of it," Philip Metres' newest poetry collection, *Sand Opera*, expresses elegant sorrow and rage at torture, war, the military-industrial complex, and bigotry. Alice James Books

INSIDE U.S. TRAFFICKING

Tricked, Jane Wells and John-Keith Wasson's 2013 documentary about the U.S. sex industry is now available on DVD. It shows us exploitive pimps, the cops who battle them, impenitent johns, and prostituted women and girls who are younger, more vulnerable, and more abused than we might imagine. First Run Features

TRANSITION WITH MEANING

In *Tailings: A Memoir*, Kaethe Schwehn skillfully describes life in intentional Christian community by narrating her year at Holden Village, a remote Lutheran retreat center. This is a sincere, at times irreverent, chronicle of one woman's time in between places, careers, relationships, and faith ideologies. Cascade Books

with Frodus, Decahedron, Battery, and Regents. When he found himself between bands in 2005, he and some fellow musician friends who were also Christian vowed to search for new sounds in old spiritual music.

On a cell phone with bad reception, one of the friends told him to check out Serbian chant. Hamacher misheard it as Syrian before the call dropped. That triggered a memory of a book he'd read a few years earlier, William Dalrymple's *From the Holy Mountain*, which recounted tales of the oldest existing Christian chant in a church in Syria. Hamacher contacted Dalrymple to ask where he might find recordings of these chants. The author responded that none were available, but suggested that the musician visit Aleppo to hear it for himself, supplying

Comcast's Net Neutrality Shell Game

THE BATTLE over net neutrality keeps getting stranger and stranger.

For years the lines were clearly drawn. On the “pro-” side were the content-providing companies (Google, Netflix, Amazon, etc.) and the public interest and consumer groups that want to preserve equal access to a potential audience of billions. Arrayed against them was Big Telecom (Verizon, Time Warner Cable, Comcast, etc.), which wanted the internet to work more like cable TV, where consumer choice is limited to the menu the provider offers.

But now the idea that internet service providers should be prohibited from charging content providers for faster downloads has become so popular that even its sworn enemies claim to favor it. They’ve even



Commission (FCC) would just approve Comcast’s merger with Time Warner Cable, it would extend those protections to all Time Warner customers, too.

All of Comcast’s claims are technically true. Comcast does have a legal commitment to abide by net neutrality. It was a requirement for federal approval of its 2011 merger with NBCUniversal, and it expires at the end of 2017. Comcast executives have adamantly refused to pledge to extend the neutral practices beyond that date. And if you keep digging through Comcast’s net neutrality pronouncements, you’ll eventually get to the bottom line. The company says it supports net neutrality, but it still opposes the idea that broadband service should be classified as a public utility for regulation by the FCC.

And that’s the catch. Back in January 2014, a federal court ruled that without the public utility classification, the FCC did not have the power to enforce net neutrality rules. After flirting with compromise through most of 2014, FCC chair Tom Wheeler now supports the reclassification of broadband. Treating broadband internet as a public utility would allow the FCC to do

the same things that it did with landline phone service in the last century—i.e., keep it open, affordable, and universally accessible.

This is where Comcast’s friends in Congress come in.

On Jan. 21, Republicans in both the House and Senate held hearings on a proposal that bans blocking, throttling, and paid prioritization but would

also prohibit the FCC from regulating broadband service as a utility. The proposal also contains a huge loophole that would exempt from the paid prioritization ban any undefined “special services” that providers might offer in the future and a measure that would prohibit the FCC from encouraging municipally owned broadband services, one of the most promising strategies for extending affordable access.

In a Reuters op-ed, the primary sponsors of the new bill, Sen. John Thune (R-SD) and Rep. Fred Upton (R-MI), argued that broadband should not be regulated as a public utility because the authorizing legislation dates from “an era of rotary telephones.” But the idea that democracy requires universal access to the means of communication is even older than the New Deal, and more relevant than ever. Today broadband internet is a service that people must have in order to be full participants in their community. The

FCC has to start treating it that way. ■



Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel White Boy.

Democracy requires universal access to the means of communication.

rounded up some of their most fervent supporters in Congress to push “net neutrality” legislation, which may come with a rider proclaiming that “war is peace.”

Comcast, the nation’s largest cable and broadband provider, pioneered this Orwellian strategy. For several months now Comcast has run print, TV, and online ads hailing its support for net neutrality—no “blocking” of sites, no “throttling” of download speeds, and no “paid prioritization” giving faster speeds to the highest bidder. Not only does Comcast support those principles, it says, but it is in fact the only internet service provider that has made a legally binding commitment to abide by them. And, by the way, if the Federal Communications

Continued from Page 41

all of this happened,” he recalls, years after his evening with royalty. “It was ‘this is the idea—are you in?’ Everyone, for the most part, has been in.”

HAMACHER, IN PARTICULAR, has been all in. Between 2006 and 2010, he made multiple trips to Syria. Sometimes he concentrated on photography, shooting pictures in holy sites around the Old City and of the Citadel of Aleppo, a structure perched on a hill where Abraham is believed to have milked his flock of sheep. He undertook a project for the Institute of Sacred Music at Yale University to capture video footage of liturgical practices. He recorded chant traditions of the Syrian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, and Assyrian/Chaldean Christian communities.

In what turned out to be his last trip to Aleppo in 2010, Hamacher realized he had no recordings of Islamic chanting. In particular, he wanted to capture recordings of

“America was being exposed to Syria only through violence. I wanted to say, let me show you what else it’s like.”

Sufi chants, a mystical expression of Islam. Hamacher asked a Syrian Muslim friend who played violin if he knew where to find such a performance. The friend laughed and explained that most such Sufi performances were less than authentic.

“There are a lot of people doing that music as cultural entrepreneurs, as someone called it. ‘You want to hear Sufi stuff? Okay, I’ll learn it, I’ll dress up and get paid to play it.’ People were kind of doing it like cover bands. It’s great that you’re playing a John Cougar Mellencamp song, but it’s way better to see John Cougar Mellencamp play it.”

Fortunately the violinist knew the real deal. His great-grandfather had been a sheik in a Sufi order that produced the most famous singers in the Arab world. The friend took Hamacher to meet with men between the ages of 17 and 50, who were gathered at a 500-year-old building next to a mosque. Several stood outside smoking and



Bradley Cooper
in *American Sniper*

SHOOTING IN A MORAL VACUUM

CLINT EASTWOOD has made films about the sorrow and repeating pointlessness of war, as seen through the eyes of both aggressor and aggressed-against, with empathic performances and unbearably moving impact. His **American Sniper**, about the most lethal sniper in U.S. military history, bloodied in Iraq and struggling at home, is not one of those films. At best it’s a valuable character study of a confused warrior, revealing the traumatic effect of his service. At worst it’s a jingoistic and xenophobic attempt to put varnish on a terrible national response to the horror of 9/11, a response that became a self-inflicted wound creating untold collateral damage.

A decade ago, Eastwood made *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*, which saw World War II soldiers as propaganda fodder and had the moral imagination to show both sides as courageous and broken without denying the difference between attacker and defender. These films are respectful and thoughtful, but *American Sniper* is arguably a work born in vengeance. Its reception (becoming one of the biggest January box office weekends ever, and a quick right-wing favorite) is part of the failure to deal in an integrated way with the wounds of 9/11, or to even begin to face the reality of the war in Iraq: an imperial conquest using the cover of national trauma as a justification.

The film’s refusal to engage the political context damages it irreparably. If we don’t know that the war was found

to be based on misrepresentation and revenge, then how can we possibly make an adequate judgment of the actions of a protagonist who killed at least 160 people because of that misrepresentation and revenge? This is a general principle too, of course—if the purpose of art is to help us live better, then to have integrity, storytellers who feature characters who behave badly have a responsibility to illuminate their motivation and context. Otherwise we learn nothing about the nature of who we are.

American Sniper could have taken a lesson from recent films such as **Nightcrawler**, which explores the psychological terrain of a news media addicted to gore and ignorant of (or in denial about) the consequences of keeping the population in fear; **Locke**, which focuses on nothing but the motivation of one man and his attempts to take responsibility for his actions; and **The Immigrant**, which responds to one person’s selfishness and cruelty by empowering his victim to set him free to take another chance at getting it right. But *American Sniper* is so dedicated to the thrill of kinetic action that it doesn’t question the impact—either of the life of its protagonist or of the story now being told about him. ■

Gareth Higgins, a northern Irish writer, curates moviesandmeaning.com and soultelegram.com, newsletters of film recommendations and spirituality writing.

joking around. Two younger men chased and kicked each other like schoolboys at recess. Hamacher wondered if this group could coalesce into singers worth recording. They retreated inside, donned white robes, formed a circle, and began to produce a cappella tones that reverberated with reverence and history. His misgivings disappeared.

"After they finished, I asked one of the guys, Fawaz—he was the oldest of the group—what did I just hear? His direct response was, 'This is how we fight terrorism.'"

In 2014, Hamacher released a CD of these recordings, *Nawa: Ancient Sufi Invocations & Forgotten Songs from Aleppo*, an album that became Volume 1 in a projected series, *Sacred Voices of Syria*. (Volume 2, *Forty Martyrs: Armenian Chanting from Aleppo*, is due out in April.) Although he had been working on these projects for years, he needed some convincing to make the recordings public.

"Once the war got really involved, I stopped working on everything. I just



Hamacher meets with Prince Michael of Greece, seated center, and Syrian Orthodox leaders in Aleppo.

stopped. Because I did not want to feel like I was capitalizing on the destruction of the country. I didn't want to do anything that could be misconstrued as taking advantage of people who housed me for so long." His personal connection with Syria hit especially hard in 2013 when he learned that Archbishop Ibrahim, his gracious host, had been kidnapped while returning to Aleppo with the Greek Orthodox archbishop. Their

driver was killed and both men taken; their whereabouts remain unknown.

Friends began to ask him if Aleppo was really the violent, devastated place being shown on television. That wasn't the Aleppo he knew. He realized he needed to circulate this music to wider audiences. "American consciousness was being exposed to Syria only through violence. I wanted to say, yeah, this is happening, but let me show

you what else it's like."

The punk ethic Hamacher has always taken to heart is to blaze your own trail. But this was a trail he never intended to set off on. "Someone said, oh, this is great, you get to live your dream. This was *not* my dream. I didn't dream of [making these recordings]. I just thought it was ludicrous that it hadn't been done before."

When in Syria, Hamacher had been surprised that people did not define themselves by their religion. "There was just one example after another of a pluralism there that I didn't know existed." He was also surprised at how encounters with Orthodox Christianity strengthened his own faith. Growing up in a Southern Baptist culture, he absorbed a message that high liturgy churches—Roman Catholic, Orthodox—were suspect, and most likely not practicing the right kind of Christian faith.

"Going to an Orthodox church, I realized it's the same basic format as a Baptist church. There's a procession, Bible readings, songs at the beginning. I felt far more connected to my faith through those experiences. Everyone's location has, for the most part, defined the way their faith has been practiced. There are eight different forms of chants in the Syrian Orthodox church, based around villages where they originally were sung. Just like there's East Coast hip-hop and West Coast hip-hop." ■

Kimberly Burge is a Sojourners contributing writer and freelance journalist in Washington, D.C. Her first book, *The Born Frees: Writing with the Girls of Gugulethu*, will be published in August by W.W. Norton. More on the *Voices of Syria* project can be found at lostorigins.com.

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Reviewed by Rosalie Riegler

PARENTING AND RESISTANCE

It Runs in the Family: On Being Raised by Radicals and Growing into Rebellious Motherhood, by Frida Berrigan. OR Books.

SOME PEOPLE (I was one) will initially read this book to learn what it was like for the author to grow up in Jonah House, a faith-based community of peacemakers in Baltimore, with internationally known activist parents Phil Berrigan and Liz McAlister providing strong ballast when not spending time in prison for nonviolent civil disobedience. I wanted to know what formed the vibrant Frida Berrigan, with whom I work on the National Committee of the War Resisters League. I learned about Frida's birth in a basement, about Jonah House folks reading the Bible before days of work as house painters or being arrested at protests, about Frida and her sibs watching television on the sly, about the nitty-gritty of dumpster-diving at Jessup Wholesale Market.

But I learned much more from *It Runs in the Family*, and the "more" is at the heart of this fascinating book, which blends memoir, parenting advice, and connections between the questions parents ask about their children and the questions we should ask about the world. Phil Berrigan and Liz McAlister taught their children about the woes and warfare of the world; in this book, Frida also gently teaches us, while describing both her life as



Author Frida Berrigan as a young child.

responsibility for their grandchildren and the economic structures that contribute to this phenomenon.

Frida writes honestly and sometimes painfully of her failures as a parent. Her story of dumping a cup of water on her baby's head brought back memories of my own strong emotions when my children were young. Frida doesn't sugarcoat the frustration, loneliness, and boredom that can be a part of both motherhood and childhood. Spouse Patrick Sheehan-Gaumer is a constant presence, and his patience seems a perfect foil for Frida's passion.

Similar to her parents, Frida is an activist, serving with War Resisters League and as a leader in the campaign to close the prison in Guantánamo. However, her activism is her own, and so is her parenting approach. In the chapter on consumerism, Frida offers chilling statistics of extravagant expenditures for "first day of school" clothing, and then goes on to explain how living below taxable income helps her not only to resist paying war taxes but to make economically and environmentally considerate decisions—even if they're

not as dramatic as the dumpster-diving of the Jonah House days.

In a poignant sequence, Frida talks about learning from her children instead of being so constantly intent on teaching them—of trying to capture some of their boundless wonder. Yes, it's frustrating when 7-year-old Rosena wants to show her stepmom her latest Lincoln Log creation instead of putting her clothes away, but this very living-in-the-now is a virtue adults might relearn from the young.

Frida's stories and the global connections she makes will initiate thoughtful discussion on resisting gendered consumerism, modeling nonviolent responses to a toddler's incessant demands, and forming neighborhood communities. In fact, why not form a parents' group to read and discuss the book together? ■

Rosalie Riegler is a mother and grandmother, peaceworker, and oral historian who interviewed Frida, her siblings, and her mother, Liz McAlister, for Doing Time for Peace: Resistance, Family, and Community.

Interview by Dave Baker

A ROOTED GOSPEL

Noel Castellanos on committing to hope and justice in vulnerable communities.

NOEL CASTELLANOS is the CEO of the Christian Community Development Association, a network of Christians committed to seeing people and communities restored spiritually, economically, physically, and mentally. In order to nurture that holistic work, committed CCDA practitioners move into under-resourced neighborhoods and try to foster community. Castellanos' experience with CCDA and a lifetime of missional community has informed his new book, *Where the Cross Meets the Street: What Happens to the Neighborhood When God Is at the Center* (IVP Books), a powerful testament to the necessity of externally focused ministry. He was interviewed via email by Dave Baker, who is responsible for school accounts and



Frida Berrigan doesn't sugarcoat the frustration, loneliness, and boredom that can be a part of both motherhood and childhood.

a child and her life as a mother to Seamus, Madeline, and stepdaughter Rosena.

For example, when Frida talks about the visits she and Seamus make to their "Uncle Dan" (Phil Berrigan's brother Daniel Berrigan, a priest, poet, and activist) and the special bond between the nonagenarian and his lively great-nephew, she also tells us of ONEgeneration daycare in California, where toddlers garden, read, and play with seniors. Then she comments on the increasing number of grandparents who have primary



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A RACE & POVERTY INITIATIVE FROM **sojourners**

diversity initiatives at Baker Book House.

Dave Baker: You write that in terms of diversity, the evangelical community is far behind the rest of society. In what ways?

Noel Castellanos: Most evangelical denominations and organizations are not very ethnically or culturally diverse in leadership. With the amazing demographic changes that are happening in our country, how can we possibly be in a position to effectively reach and disciple people of color if the leadership on boards and in executive positions is all white?

What is your biggest challenge as CEO of CCDA? CCDA is a broad and diverse family held together by a core commitment to be a witness of the kingdom in the most vulnerable neighborhoods. My biggest challenge is to create an environment where every-

Sustainable community change cannot be done quickly.

body feels valued and respected in spite of our racial, theological, and denominational differences. Our call is to love one another across racial and class lines and to demonstrate that God's people can be at the forefront of loving the poor.

Why do you recommend a 15-year-minimum commitment for people who would like to move into a community and apply the CCDA philosophy? CCDA's 15-year-minimum rule highlights the reality that our work is not a Band-Aid. If the focus of our ministry were simply to rescue individuals through personal salvation and development, then we could see lives touched by the love of Christ much sooner than 15 years. But sustainable community change cannot be done quickly. It has taken a long time for many of our most vulnerable neighborhoods to get to the state that they're in. It is naïve to think that we can change and transform those neighborhoods overnight. I believe a long-term commitment to minister holistically in a community is the most effective way to for the church to engage

neighborhoods that desperately need the witness of God's love and power.

What books do you have on your urban ministry reading list? Anything by John Perkins. He has articulated a truly indigen-
ous and contextualized theology of ministry among the poor here in the U.S. That is significant, and it is what I have tried to do myself from a Mexican-American perspective. Anything by Virgilio Elizondo is a must-read for those that want to understand urban ministry in the Latino context.

What are three things you would like us to know about your book? First, because of my commitment to developing indigenous leadership in our churches and in our country, I hope my story can be an encouragement

to young Latino/as and others who need to see examples of leaders that look like them. And it is important for people to realize that nonwhite leaders are very capable of leading diverse institutions like CCDA. Second, I would love for my book to help others to discover what their God-given burden is. If I could encourage folks to consider a lifetime of service to the poor and the marginalized, that would excite me. Finally, I hope people will see a compelling way to better understand the kingdom approach that is needed to transform vulnerable neighborhoods, and to see what can happen when God's people engage biblically in a neighborhood. When I think about places like Ferguson, Mo., I am convinced that the principles in my book can bring a lasting change that includes individual life change, compassion, development, and justice. ■

who was made manifest to us in the human, embodied life of Jesus.

The journey into an incarnational faith that lies at the heart of this book eventually leads Sutterfield to begin training for the most grueling of all endurance events, the Ironman triathlon, a race consisting of

Too often we are apathetic about our bodies, unwilling to wrestle with our desires.

more than 140 miles of swimming, biking, and running. Uniquely structured, *This is My Body* alternates chapters narrating Sutterfield's larger conversion story with ones that focus on the particular story of preparing for the Ironman race. Although the book will definitely appeal to triathletes, runners, and other endurance athletes, and although it is in a similar vein to classics such as *Born to Run* and *Eat and Run*, the well-crafted storytelling and keen theological reflections on the Christian significance of our bodies make this a book that should be widely read among Christians.

Yes, the frank intensity of the chapters on training for the Ironman can, at times, become a wee bit overwhelming, but perhaps these stories serve as a type of the "large and startling figures" that Flannery O'Connor maintained were necessary to grab the attention of an apathetic audience. Too often we are indeed apathetic about our bodies, unwilling to wrestle with our desires—for particular kinds of food, for comfort that is averse to exercise, for particular images of bodies that we are fed in the media—and to begin the journey toward healthy personhood in body, mind, and spirit. Sutterfield's journey, as chronicled in *This is My Body*, is a poignant reminder that though the way will be grueling, there is a deep joy in the health we experience in thoughtfully and faithfully caring for our bodies. ■

C. Christopher Smith is co-author of *Slow Church: Cultivating Community in the Patient Way of Jesus* and the founding editor of *The Englewood Review of Books*.

Reviewed by C. Christopher Smith

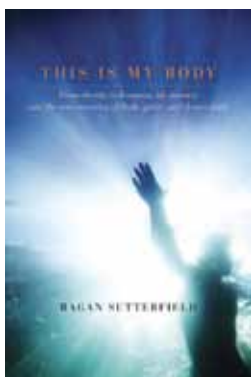
CONQUERING A GREAT DIVIDE

***This is My Body: From Obesity to Ironman, My Journey into the True Meaning of Flesh, Spirit, and Deeper Faith*, by Ragan Sutterfield. Convergent Books.**

WE LIVE IN an age of deep fragmentation. Like the ancient Gnostics, who believed in a deep divide between mind and body, we too are inclined to elevate the mind, or the spirit, over the body. The critic Harold Bloom once suggested that the religious practice of most Americans is "closer to ancient Gnostics than to early Christians."

Ragan Sutterfield's new memoir, *This is My Body: From Obesity to Ironman, My Journey into the True Meaning of Flesh, Spirit, and Deeper Faith*, recounts the story of his own struggles amid the fragmentation of our times. Having wrestled with being overweight since his childhood, Sutterfield eventually finds himself with a failing marriage and at his heaviest weight. He is faced with the incongruity that he is an environmentalist and farmer, doing grueling work to care for the land and creation, and yet taking poor care of his own body.

This is My Body is a compelling story of conversion, not unlike St. Augustine's



Confessions, as Sutterfield finds himself drawn out of the typical U.S. sort of Christianity that has little regard for the body and into a deeper faith in Christ, in which spirit and body are deeply interwoven. After the collapse of his first marriage, Sutterfield surrenders himself to the disciplines needed to care better for his body, specifically controlling his diet and becoming serious about exercise. From this conversion point onward, Sutterfield begins to learn and experience an incarnational faith in which our bodies cannot be taken for granted. He writes:

What if God ... became flesh and remains enfleshed? What if God not only has a heart that longs for our love but also a heart that pounds with blood? What if God has skin that drips with sweat? What if the God who offered his body as a sign of love also wants us to experience our bodies as a gift of ... love? Christians must worship a God who is all of these things because we worship a God

Easter and a Love Supreme

DURING THE EASTER SEASON, the first reading in our lectionary becomes, strangely, a New Testament reading. Most of the year, we immerse ourselves in the scripture we share with the Jews, but after the resurrection we traipse through the book of Acts. The claim being made is that the history of God's chosen people continues in the history of the church. God is still working signs and wonders. And these include the sharing of goods in common, the fact that there are no needy people among us, bringing awe and distress among our neighbors, and a dawning kingdom brought slightly closer. Just like in our churches and communities today, right?

These Easter texts are also deeply sensual and material. God's reign is imagined as a banquet with rich wines and marrow-filled meats. Love between sisters and brothers is like oil running down the head, over the face. The resurrection texts themselves insist on this point more emphatically than any other: Jesus is raised *in his body*. This is the beginning of God's resurrecting power breaking out all over the creation God loves. What could ever be impossible after a resurrection? Our limited imaginations of the possible (Can we make budget? Can we get a few more votes on this bill? Can we improve lives in this neighborhood?) are



shown for the bankruptcy in which they are mired. A new order is here. We pray, God, make our imaginations match the sensuousness, the materiality, the grandeur of what you have already accomplished and, more daringly still, what you promise yet to do.

Jason Byassee is pastor of Boone United Methodist Church in Boone, N.C., and a fellow in theology and leadership at Duke Divinity School.

[APRIL 5]

Food Porn or Heavenly Banquet?

Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18

ON EASTER, trying too hard can yield the opposite result of what we intend. We do better to try for a base hit than to swing for the fences. Interpreting these texts well is work sufficient for this greatest of good days.

A central theme here is eating. Lavishly. Isaiah depicts an almost unimaginable banquet in sensuous detail. Films such as *Like Water for Chocolate* or *Tortilla Soup* or *The Hundred-Foot Journey* come to mind. Cynics call them “food porn.” Christians call it “the kingdom.” Imagine the greatest wedding feast you’ve ever been to and multiply it.

Jesus isn’t back among us for any time at all before he’s eating again. It’s often said you can’t open a page of the gospels where Jesus isn’t eating. Everywhere he goes there’s food and drink and friends and enemies and a party. Acts is keen to insist that the apostles ate and drank with him *after* he rose. The messianic banquet has begun. It is not yet as extravagant as Isaiah imagines. Not all the invitees are at the party yet; the poor are not

yet the guests of honor; the proud are not yet brought low. But the appetizers are out. We call them sacraments. They have to change how we eat and drink and invite in the rest of our lives.

The story of Jesus’ appearance to Mary is one of the most beautifully wrought in scripture. It is almost unbearably understated. A rumor. A run. Rolled-up clothes. Belief. Tears. Misunderstanding. A name. A refused embrace. And a promise. So much, in so few words. Two observations for now. One, Mary mistakes Jesus for the gardener. The best explanation? *Because he’s gardening*. He is working on restoring the Garden in which God first planted us. Two, Jesus makes an oddly wordy promise: “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” A Trinitarian point: Jesus makes *his* Father *ours*, and makes *our* God *his*. The great exchange of salvation is displayed here. We who are not natural children are graciously adopted. Plenty to talk about over dinner.

[APRIL 12]

Can God Breathe?

Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

AT SOME POINT a silly rumor spread that Christians are not interested in bodies, this world, or the material lives of our neighbors. These texts shout in the other direction. To read them is to see that Christianity is about all being fed, since the Word has come among us in a tactile way to allow us to touch and feel and handle him. Our faith is about being breathed on by a God who loves materiality enough to make it and become physically part of it, in Christ and in us.

The best part of the Acts text is usually left untranslated: “Great grace was upon them all, *for* there was not a needy person among them.” The preposition is usually left out and replaced with a sentence-ending period. Acts means to say that “great grace” is seen in the fact that there is no one needy. The community without poverty imagined in the Promised Land is fulfilled here in church (Deuteronomy 15:4). The psalmist also imagines a promised land with unimaginable wholeness instead of our present fragmentation. Unity and friendship are like anointing (we might say “messiah-ing”), from Hermon in the north to Zion in the south.

Most people don’t think of God as someone we can touch with our hands. The 1 John text insists that the apostles have done just that. Most don’t think of God breathing. God does—on us—empowering us to forgive like Jesus does. These texts press us to say God is the most material thing there is. The question is not whether God exists, but whether we do (thanks Stanley Hauerwas, paraphrasing Aquinas). We exist in earnest by forgiving as God forgives, by touching others with food and kindness and friendship as God has done in our flesh.

This gospel passage is a handy counterpoint to last week’s statement by Jesus, “do not hold on to me.” Here he accepts Thomas’ challenge and shows him his hands and side. Caravaggio famously imagines Thomas jabbing his fingers inside. It is hard to imagine a more visceral illustration of our call to be “handlers” of the Word.

[APRIL 19]

Guilty Bystanders

Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7;
Luke 24:36b-48

IF YOU OR I were planning a resurrection, it would be spectacular. Cameras rolling, impressive tricks, news at 11. When Jesus is raised, he walks through a wall and eats a fish (thanks to D. Stephen Long for this observation). The resurrection is not a magic trick. It is the restoration of the cosmos, in all its ordinarieness.

I confess a certain preacherly discomfort with Acts' rhetoric. The apostles regularly say a variant of this: "God raised Jesus whom *you* killed." It seems a seed for the church's historic blame of the Jews for Jesus' death, when scripture is elsewhere absolutely clear it is *we* who kill Jesus, all of us. Acts redeems itself here though: "You killed the Author of life," Peter says (3:15). Is that even possible? By

**This is the beginning
of God's resurrecting
power breaking out over
the creation God loves.**

definition, God cannot *not* be. God cannot die. But by virtue of the incarnation, God's flesh is as frail as ours. And as soon as it is, as soon as we can get our hands on God, it's over. The murder that has blood on all our hands turns out to bring about our salvation. That blood doesn't just soil; it saves.

Psalm 4 has been a favorite for monastic communities for millennia. They chant it at compline, the last liturgy of the day before they retire to bed. "I lie down in peace and sleep comes at once," it exudes. Every time we lay our head down is a rehearsal for our own death and the hope we have that (preposterously) extends beyond it. Until then, how we walk through walls and eat ordinary food matters more than we can imagine. How we break down walls and share food can instantiate now the kingdom to which God is inviting all people. "Start practicing now to be a sweet little old woman or man when you're old," Kathleen Norris says. "Because however old you are, you'll need all the time you have left to get there."

[APRIL 26]

Love Abides

Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-24;
John 10:11-18

A THEOLOGICAL argument broke out in a new-member class I was teaching. "Do you even think there is a hell?" one aggressive questioner asked from my left. "It's black and white to me; you either accept Jesus or you go there," another said from my right.

We hear plenty about the position from the right. Texts like Acts are behind it: "There is salvation in no one else," it thunders. "For there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Less well known is the biblical pressure from the other side—the left: "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold," Jesus says. "I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16). Our deadlock was presaged in the Bible itself. In context, Jesus in John is probably referring to Gentiles—even though Muslim apologists suggest it refers to them; others see signs of extraterrestrials there (really!). The church is a multigenerational argument over how to read scripture well, through which we hurt one another and learn how to forgive one another.

It is striking how easily we avoid texts whose meaning is more plain: "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" (1 John 3:17). We would rather argue theology than live that out.

Psalm 23 may be our most familiar verse in this lectionary, but it's also the trickiest. Psalm 23 has been rendered toothless by incessant quotation, needle-pointing, and pop-culture referencing. It should not be used to offer generic, content-less "comfort." It is rather about the more costly and difficult subject of enemy-love. God's table in the midst of God's enemies yields Jesus' cross—the basis on which anyone is ever saved, anyone ever fed, anyone ever comforted, any other religion respected: "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16). ■

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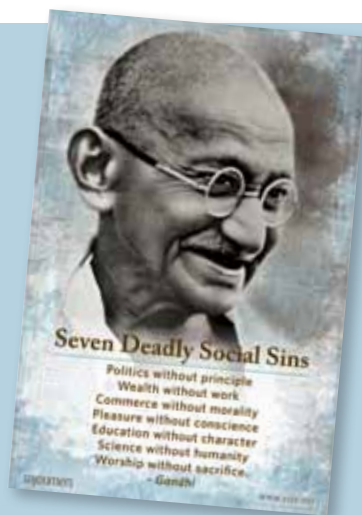
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First World Problems...

WHEN YOU WORK for a Christian justice organization, it's hard to complain about your petty personal problems. Dishwasher leaving spots on the glassware at home? Don't mention it in the office or you get called out for a "First World problem." Not happy with your cable company? "Dude, First World problem!" retorts a colleague, pouring coffee into his Amnesty International mug before a meeting on income inequality.

I work with people who have traveled the world working for peace and freedom, who have spent time in jail for their beliefs, but who show no sympathy when L.L. Bean messes up my order. (I purchased the medium winter pullover from their activewear collection, but they sent me a small. And it pinches when I lift my arms to pray during chapel.)

In short, my peers are saints working for a better world. And for-



See how I did that? I shifted from one of the darkest periods of the 20th century to trivial thoughts about new stuff in my house. And from new cabinets to thoughts of kitchen paint schemes is but a short step down the sordid trail to shameless self-indulgence. But such is the thrall of the First World and its petty charms that one can hardly escape.

Even during my annual trip to an orphanage for sick children in Honduras, one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere, in the city with one of the highest murder rates in the world, in one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in that city, I was distracted by thoughts of contemporary laminates.

Shame on me, of course. Not that it mattered, since I was unable to stimulate any interest for the topic at the orphanage. It was like being at Sojourners, but with better coffee.

I tried to get the children to weigh in on the choice between brushed nickel and pewter—as regards to drawer hardware—but I noted their singular lack of empathy, despite my best attempts to talk in a most animated fashion, even going so far as to use actual Spanish. (I know the word for “kitchen,” but I had trouble with “self-closing drawers.”)

Far better, I discovered, was to speak in the international language of friendship: Angry Birds. The game is on my smart phone, which was immediately confiscated by eager

young hands and not returned to me until the day of my departure.

BUT BEFORE I left, my mind was finally cleared of thoughts of First World kitchens. It happened at exactly midnight, New Year's Eve, when I was awakened by the sounds of explosions and small-arms fire reminiscent of either a full-scale allied invasion or an average-size wedding in Afghanistan.

It's a Honduran tradition, I was told, using munitions purchased from local gang members freelancing outside their primary business model of illicit drugs and bicycle theft. And it lasted exactly two hours, after which it calmed to an occasional sporadic explosion over the next few days, each one timed (coincidentally, I think) to my kitchen deliberations. It was the coarsest of behavior modification but also a clear call for repentance from an angry God. Or maybe angry Chinese munitions manufacturers. Either way, it was instructive: Kitchens are not important. They make you flinch.

Two other things occurred to me during my trip: Overweight gang members look funny on little bikes that don't belong to them. And children with compromised immune systems can outplay me in Angry Birds, every time. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Saints (and sinners) around the water cooler.

Unfortunately for them, they don't have to look outside the office to see what's wrong with that world, for I walk among them. I am he (or maybe him), the self-centered manchild whose personal preoccupations give a counterbalance to the righteous intentions of my colleagues. It's a dirty job, but somebody's got to do it.

And that somebody needs new kitchen cabinets.

In my defense—I hurriedly explain to officemates rushing to their next strategy meeting on climate change, this time carrying coffee mugs from Greenpeace—our old cabinets are SO last century. In fact, they were made in the same century as the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, a minor monarch whose death prompted the conflagration of World War I. But back to my cabinets.

Ken Davis

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